

WOMEN AUTHORS OF SUPERNATURAL AND SCIENCE FICTION

Twenty tales of horror, ghosts, aliens and other unexplainable phenomena – told with humor or all seriousness -- from the mid-19th through mid-20th centuries. Anthology by Matt Pierard from public domain sources. Creative Commons copyright 2016.

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The Dead and the Countess

The Project Gutenberg EBook of **The Bell in the Fog and Other Stories**

by Gertrude Atherton

(Republished from the _Smart Set_)

It was an old cemetery, and they had been long dead. Those who died nowadays were put in the new burying-place on the hill, close to the Bois d'Amour and within sound of the bells that called the living to mass. But the little church where the mass was celebrated stood faithfully beside the older dead; a new church, indeed, had not been built in that forgotten corner of Finisterre for centuries, not since the calvary on its pile of stones had been raised in the tiny square, surrounded then, as now, perhaps, by gray naked cottages; not since the castle with its round tower, down on the river, had been erected for the Counts of Croisac. But the stone walls enclosing that ancient cemetery had been kept in good repair, and there were no weeds within, nor toppling headstones. It looked cold and gray and desolate, like all the cemeteries of Brittany, but it was made hideous neither by tawdry gewgaws nor the license of time.

And sometimes it was close to a picture of beauty. When the village celebrated its yearly _pardon_, a great procession came out of the church--priests in glittering robes, young men in their gala costume of black and silver, holding flashing standards aloft, and many maidens in flapping white head-dress and collar, black frocks and aprons flaunting with ribbons and lace. They marched, chanting, down the road beside the wall of the cemetery, where lay the generations that in their day had held the banners and chanted the service of the _pardon_. For the dead were peasants and priests--the Croisacs had their burying-place in a hollow of the hills behind the castle--old men and women who had wept and died for the fishermen that had gone to the _grande pêche_ and returned no more, and now and again a child, slept there. Those who walked past the dead at the _pardon_, or after the marriage ceremony, or took part in any one of the minor religious festivals with which the Catholic village enlivens its existence--all, young and old, looked grave and sad. For the women from childhood know that their lot is to wait and dread and weep, and the men that the ocean is treacherous and cruel, but that bread can be wrung from no other master. Therefore the living have little sympathy for the dead who have laid down their crushing burden; and the dead under their stones slumber contentedly enough. There is no envy among them for the young who wander at evening and pledge their troth in the Bois d'Amour, only pity for the groups of women who wash their linen in the creek that flows to the river. They look like pictures in the green quiet book of nature, these women, in their glistening white head-gear and deep collars; but the dead know better than to envy them, and the women--and the lovers--know better than to pity the dead.

The dead lay at rest in their boxes and thanked God they were quiet and had found everlasting peace.

And one day even this, for which they had patiently endured life, was taken from them.

The village was picturesque and there was none quite like it, even in Finisterre. Artists discovered it and made it famous. After the artists followed the tourists, and the old creaking _diligence_ became an absurdity. Brittany was the fashion for three months of the year, and wherever there is fashion there is at least one railway. The one built to satisfy the thousands who wished to visit the wild, sad beauties of the west of France was laid along the road beside the little cemetery of this tale.

It takes a long while to awaken the dead. These heard neither the voluble working-men nor even the first snort of the engine. And, of course, they neither heard nor knew of the pleadings of the old priest that the line should be laid elsewhere. One night he came out into the old cemetery and sat on a grave and wept. For he loved his dead and felt it to be a tragic pity that the greed of money, and the fever of travel, and the petty ambitions of men whose place was in the great cities where such ambitions were born, should shatter forever the holy calm of those who had suffered so much on earth. He had known many of them in life, for he was very old; and although he believed, like all good Catholics, in heaven and purgatory and hell, yet he always saw his friends as he had buried them, peacefully asleep in their coffins, the souls lying with folded hands like the bodies that held them, patiently awaiting the final call. He would never have told you, this good old priest, that he believed heaven to be a great echoing palace in which God and the archangels dwelt alone waiting for that great day when the elected dead should rise and enter the Presence together, for he was a simple old man who had read and thought little; but he had a zigzag of fancy in his humble mind, and he saw his friends and his ancestors' friends as I have related to you, soul and body in the deep undreaming sleep of death, but sleep, not a rotted body deserted by its affrighted mate; and to all who sleep there comes, sooner or later, the time of awakening.

He knew that they had slept through the wild storms that rage on the coast of Finisterre, when ships are flung on the rocks and trees crash down in the Bois d'Amour. He knew that the soft, slow chantings of the _pardon_ never struck a chord in those frozen memories, meagre and monotonous as their store had been; nor the bagpipes down in the open village hall--a mere roof on poles--when the bride and her friends danced for three days without a smile on their sad brown faces.

All this the dead had known in life and it could not disturb nor

interest them now. But that hideous intruder from modern civilization, a train of cars with a screeching engine, that would shake the earth which held them and rend the peaceful air with such discordant sounds that neither dead nor living could sleep! His life had been one long unbroken sacrifice, and he sought in vain to imagine one greater, which he would cheerfully assume could this disaster be spared his dead.

But the railway was built, and the first night the train went screaming by, shaking the earth and rattling the windows of the church, he went out and sprinkled every grave with holy-water.

And thereafter, twice a day, at dawn and at night, as the train tore a noisy tunnel in the quiet air, like the plebeian upstart it was, he sprinkled every grave, rising sometimes from a bed of pain, at other times defying wind and rain and hail. And for a while he believed that his holy device had deepened the sleep of his dead, locked them beyond the power of man to awake. But one night he heard them muttering.

It was late. There were but a few stars on a black sky. Not a breath of wind came over the lonely plains beyond, or from the sea. There would be no wrecks to-night, and all the world seemed at peace. The lights were out in the village. One burned in the tower of Croisac, where the young wife of the count lay ill. The priest had been with her when the train thundered by, and she had whispered to him:

"Would that I were on it! Oh, this lonely lonely land! this cold echoing château, with no one to speak to day after day! If it kills me, _mon père_, make him lay me in the cemetery by the road, that twice a day I may hear the train go by--the train that goes to Paris! If they put me down there over the hill, I will shriek in my coffin every night."

The priest had ministered as best he could to the ailing soul of the young noblewoman, with whose like he seldom dealt, and hastened back to his dead. He mused, as he toiled along the dark road with rheumatic legs, on the fact that the woman should have the same fancy as himself.

"If she is really sincere, poor young thing," he thought aloud, "I will forbear to sprinkle holy-water on her grave. For those who suffer while alive should have all they desire after death, and I am afraid the count neglects her. But I pray God that my dead have not heard that monster to-night." And he tucked his gown under his arm and hurriedly told his rosary.

But when he went about among the graves with the holy-water he heard the dead muttering.

"Jean-Marie," said a voice, fumbling among its unused tones for forgotten notes, "art thou ready? Surely that is the last call."

"Nay, nay," rumbled another voice, "that is not the sound of a trumpet, François. That will be sudden and loud and sharp, like the great blasts of the north when they come plunging over the sea from out the awful gorges of Iceland. Dost thou remember them, François? Thank the good God they spared us to die in our beds with our grandchildren about us and only the little wind sighing in the Bois d'Amour. Ah, the poor comrades that died in their manhood, that went to the _grande pêche_ once too often! Dost thou remember when the great wave curled round Ignace like his poor wife's arms, and we saw him no more? We clasped each other's hands, for we believed that we should follow, but we lived and went again and again to the _grande pêche_, and died in our beds. _Grâce à Dieu_!"

"Why dost thou think of that now--here in the grave where it matters not, even to the living?"

"I know not; but it was of that night when Ignace went down that I thought as the living breath went out of me. Of what didst thou think as thou layest dying?"

"Of the money I owed to Dominique and could not pay. I sought to ask my son to pay it, but death had come suddenly and I could not speak. God knows how they treat my name to-day in the village of St. Hilaire."

"Thou art forgotten," murmured another voice. "I died forty years after thee and men remember not so long in Finisterre. But thy son was my friend and I remember that he paid the money."

"And my son, what of him? Is he, too, here?"

"Nay; he lies deep in the northern sea. It was his second voyage, and he had returned with a purse for the young wife, the first time. But he returned no more, and she washed in the river for the dames of Croisac, and by-and-by she died. I would have married her, but she said it was enough to lose one husband. I married another, and she grew ten years in every three that I went to the _grande pêche_. Alas for Brittany, she has no youth!"

"And thou? Wert thou an old man when thou camest here?"

"Sixty. My wife came first, like many wives. She lies here. Jeanne!"

"Is't thy voice, my husband? Not the Lord Jesus Christ's? What miracle is this? I thought that terrible sound was the tramp of doom."

"It could not be, old Jeanne, for we are still in our graves. When the tramp sounds we shall have wings and robes of light, and fly straight up

to heaven. Hast thou slept well?"

"Ay! But why are we awakened? Is it time for purgatory? Or have we been there?"

"The good God knows. I remember nothing. Art frightened? Would that I could hold thy hand, as when thou didst slip from life into that long sleep thou didst fear, yet welcome."

"I am frightened, my husband. But it is sweet to hear thy voice, hoarse and hollow as it is from the mould of the grave. Thank the good God thou didst bury me with the rosary in my hands," and she began telling the beads rapidly.

"If God is good," cried François, harshly, and his voice came plainly to the priest's ears, as if the lid of the coffin had rotted, "why are we awakened before our time? What foul fiend was it that thundered and screamed through the frozen avenues of my brain? Has God, perchance, been vanquished and does the Evil One reign in His stead?"

"Tut, tut! Thou blasphemest! God reigns, now and always. It is but a punishment He has laid upon us for the sins of earth."

"Truly, we were punished enough before we descended to the peace of this narrow house. Ah, but it is dark and cold! Shall we lie like this for an eternity, perhaps? On earth we longed for death, but feared the grave. I would that I were alive again, poor and old and alone and in pain. It were better than this. Curse the foul fiend that woke us!"

"Curse not, my son," said a soft voice, and the priest stood up and uncovered and crossed himself, for it was the voice of his aged predecessor. "I cannot tell thee what this is that has rudely shaken us in our graves and freed our spirits of their blessed thralldom, and I like not the consciousness of this narrow house, this load of earth on my tired heart. But it is right, it must be right, or it would not be at all--ah, me!"

For a baby cried softly, hopelessly, and from a grave beyond came a mother's anguished attempt to still it.

"Ah, the good God!" she cried. "I, too, thought it was the great call, and that in a moment I should rise and find my child and go to my Ignace, my Ignace whose bones lie white on the floor of the sea. Will he find them, my father, when the dead shall rise again? To lie here and doubt!--that were worse than life."

"Yes, yes," said the priest; "all will be well, my daughter."

"But all is not well, my father, for my baby cries and is alone in a little box in the ground. If I could claw my way to her with my hands--but my old mother lies between us."

"Tell your beads!" commanded the priest, sternly--"tell your beads, all of you. All ye that have not your beads, say the 'Hail Mary!' one hundred times."

Immediately a rapid, monotonous muttering arose from every lonely chamber of that desecrated ground. All obeyed but the baby, who still moaned with the hopeless grief of deserted children. The living priest knew that they would talk no more that night, and went into the church to pray till dawn. He was sick with horror and terror, but not for himself. When the sky was pink and the air full of the sweet scents of morning, and a piercing scream tore a rent in the early silences, he hastened out and sprinkled his graves with a double allowance of holy-water. The train rattled by with two short derisive shrieks, and before the earth had ceased to tremble the priest laid his ear to the ground. Alas, they were still awake!

"The fiend is on the wing again," said Jean-Marie; "but as he passed I felt as if the finger of God touched my brow. It can do us no harm."

"I, too, felt that heavenly caress!" exclaimed the old priest. "And I!" "And I!" "And I!" came from every grave but the baby's.

The priest of earth, deeply thankful that his simple device had comforted them, went rapidly down the road to the castle. He forgot that he had not broken his fast nor slept. The count was one of the directors of the railroad, and to him he would make a final appeal.

It was early, but no one slept at Croisac. The young countess was dead. A great bishop had arrived in the night and administered extreme unction. The priest hopefully asked if he might venture into the presence of the bishop. After a long wait in the kitchen, he was told that he could speak with _Monsieur l'Évêque_. He followed the servant up the wide spiral stair of the tower, and from its twenty-eighth step entered a room hung with purple cloth stamped with golden fleurs-de-lis. The bishop lay six feet above the floor on one of the splendid carved cabinet beds that are built against the walls in Brittany. Heavy curtains shaded his cold white face. The priest, who was small and bowed, felt immeasurably below that august presence, and sought for words.

"What is it, my son?" asked the bishop, in his cold weary voice. "Is the matter so pressing? I am very tired."

Brokenly, nervously, the priest told his story, and as he strove to

convey the tragedy of the tormented dead he not only felt the poverty of his expression--for he was little used to narrative--but the torturing thought assailed him that what he said sounded wild and unnatural, real as it was to him. But he was not prepared for its effect on the bishop. He was standing in the middle of the room, whose gloom was softened and gilded by the waxen lights of a huge candelabra; his eyes, which had wandered unseeingly from one massive piece of carved furniture to another, suddenly lit on the bed, and he stopped abruptly, his tongue rolling out. The bishop was sitting up, livid with wrath.

"And this was thy matter of life and death, thou prating madman!" he thundered. "For this string of foolish lies I am kept from my rest, as if I were another old lunatic like thyself! Thou art not fit to be a priest and have the care of souls. To-morrow--"

But the priest had fled, wringing his hands.

As he stumbled down the winding stair he ran straight into the arms of the count. Monsieur de Croisac had just closed a door behind him. He opened it, and, leading the priest into the room, pointed to his dead countess, who lay high up against the wall, her hands clasped, unmindful for evermore of the six feet of carved cupids and lilies that upheld her. On high pedestals at head and foot of her magnificent couch the pale flames rose from tarnished golden candlesticks. The blue hangings of the room, with their white fleurs-de-lis, were faded, like the rugs on the old dim floor; for the splendor of the Croisacs had departed with the Bourbons. The count lived in the old château because he must; but he reflected bitterly to-night that if he had made the mistake of bringing a young girl to it, there were several things he might have done to save her from despair and death.

"Pray for her," he said to the priest. "And you will bury her in the old cemetery. It was her last request."

He went out, and the priest sank on his knees and mumbled his prayers for the dead. But his eyes wandered to the high narrow windows through which the countess had stared for hours and days, stared at the fishermen sailing north for the _grande pêche_, followed along the shore of the river by wives and mothers, until their boats were caught in the great waves of the ocean beyond; often at naught more animate than the dark flood, the wooded banks, the ruins, the rain driving like needles through the water. The priest had eaten nothing since his meagre breakfast at twelve the day before, and his imagination was active. He wondered if the soul up there rejoiced in the death of the beautiful restless body, the passionate brooding mind. He could not see her face from where he knelt, only the waxen hands clasping a crucifix. He wondered if the face were peaceful in death, or peevish and angry as when he had seen it last. If the great change had smoothed and sealed

it, then perhaps the soul would sink deep under the dark waters, grateful for oblivion, and that cursed train could not awaken it for years to come. Curiosity succeeded wonder. He cut his prayers short, got to his weary swollen feet and pushed a chair to the bed. He mounted it and his face was close to the dead woman's. Alas! it was not peaceful. It was stamped with the tragedy of a bitter renunciation. After all, she had been young, and at the last had died unwillingly. There was still a fierce tenseness about the nostrils, and her upper lip was curled as if her last word had been an imprecation. But she was very beautiful, despite the emaciation of her features. Her black hair nearly covered the bed, and her lashes looked too heavy for the sunken cheeks.

"_Pauvre petite_!" thought the priest. "No, she will not rest, nor would she wish to. I will not sprinkle holy-water on her grave. It is wondrous that monster can give comfort to any one, but if he can, so be it."

He went into the little oratory adjoining the bedroom and prayed more fervently. But when the watchers came an hour later they found him in a stupor, huddled at the foot of the altar.

When he awoke he was in his own bed in his little house beside the church. But it was four days before they would let him rise to go about his duties, and by that time the countess was in her grave.

The old housekeeper left him to take care of himself. He waited eagerly for the night. It was raining thinly, a gray quiet rain that blurred the landscape and soaked the ground in the Bois d'Amour. It was wet about the graves, too; but the priest had given little heed to the elements in his long life of crucified self, and as he heard the remote echo of the evening train he hastened out with his holy-water and had sprinkled every grave but one when the train sped by.

Then he knelt and listened eagerly. It was five days since he had knelt there last. Perhaps they had sunk again to rest. In a moment he wrung his hands and raised them to heaven. All the earth beneath him was filled with lamentation. They wailed for mercy, for peace, for rest; they cursed the foul fiend who had shattered the locks of death; and among the voices of men and children the priest distinguished the quavering notes of his aged predecessor; not cursing, but praying with bitter entreaty. The baby was screaming with the accents of mortal terror and its mother was too frantic to care.

"Alas," cried the voice of Jean-Marie, "that they never told us what purgatory was like! What do the priests know? When we were threatened with punishment of our sins not a hint did we have of this. To sleep for a few hours, haunted with the moment of awakening! Then a cruel insult from the earth that is tired of us, and the orchestra of hell. Again! and again! and again! Oh God! How long? How long?"

The priest stumbled to his feet and ran over graves and paths to the mound above the countess. There he would hear a voice praising the monster of night and dawn, a note of content in this terrible chorus of despair which he believed would drive him mad. He vowed that on the morrow he would move his dead, if he had to un-bury them with his own hands and carry them up the hill to graves of his own making.

For a moment he heard no sound. He knelt and laid his ear to the grave, then pressed it more closely and held his breath. A long rumbling moan reached it, then another and another. But there were no words.

"Is she moaning in sympathy with my poor friends?" he thought; "or have they terrified her? Why does she not speak to them? Perhaps they would forget their plight were she to tell them of the world they have left so long. But it was not their world. Perhaps that it is which distresses her, for she will be lonelier here than on earth. Ah!"

A sharp horrified cry pierced to his ears, then a gasping shriek, and another; all dying away in a dreadful smothered rumble.

The priest rose and wrung his hands, looking to the wet skies for inspiration.

"Alas!" he sobbed, "she is not content. She has made a terrible mistake. She would rest in the deep sweet peace of death, and that monster of iron and fire and the frantic dead about her are tormenting a soul so tormented in life. There may be rest for her in the vault behind the castle, but not here. I know, and I shall do my duty--now, at once."

He gathered his robes about him and ran as fast as his old legs and rheumatic feet would take him towards the château, whose lights gleamed through the rain. On the bank of the river he met a fisherman and begged to be taken by boat. The fisherman wondered, but picked the priest up in his strong arms, lowered him into the boat, and rowed swiftly towards the château. When they landed he made fast.

"I will wait for you in the kitchen, my father," he said; and the priest blessed him and hurried up to the castle.

Once more he entered through the door of the great kitchen, with its blue tiles, its glittering brass and bronze warming-pans which had comforted nobles and monarchs in the days of Croisac splendor. He sank into a chair beside the stove while a maid hastened to the count. She returned while the priest was still shivering, and announced that her master would see his holy visitor in the library.

It was a dreary room where the count sat waiting for the priest, and it

smelled of musty calf, for the books on the shelves were old. A few novels and newspapers lay on the heavy table, a fire burned on the andirons, but the paper on the wall was very dark and the fleurs-de-lis were tarnished and dull. The count, when at home, divided his time between this library and the water, when he could not chase the boar or the stag in the forests. But he often went to Paris, where he could afford the life of a bachelor in a wing of his great hotel; he had known too much of the extravagance of women to give his wife the key of the faded salons. He had loved the beautiful girl when he married her, but her repinings and bitter discontent had alienated him, and during the past year he had held himself aloof from her in sullen resentment. Too late he understood, and dreamed passionately of atonement. She had been a high-spirited brilliant eager creature, and her unsatisfied mind had dwelt constantly on the world she had vividly enjoyed for one year. And he had given her so little in return!

He rose as the priest entered, and bowed low. The visit bored him, but the good old priest commanded his respect; moreover, he had performed many offices and rites in his family. He moved a chair towards his guest, but the old man shook his head and nervously twisted his hands together.

"Alas, _monsieur le comte_, " he said, "it may be that you, too, will tell me that I am an old lunatic, as did _Monsieur l'Évêque_. Yet I must speak, even if you tell your servants to fling me out of the château."

The count had started slightly. He recalled certain acid comments of the bishop, followed by a statement that a young _curé_ should be sent, gently to supersede the old priest, who was in his dotage. But he replied suavely:

"You know, my father, that no one in this castle will ever show you disrespect. Say what you wish; have no fear. But will you not sit down? I am very tired."

The priest took the chair and fixed his eyes appealingly on the count.

"It is this, monsieur." He spoke rapidly, lest his courage should go. "That terrible train, with its brute of iron and live coals and foul smoke and screeching throat, has awakened my dead. I guarded them with holy-water and they heard it not, until one night when I missed--I was with madame as the train shrieked by shaking the nails out of the coffins. I hurried back, but the mischief was done, the dead were awake, the dear sleep of eternity was shattered. They thought it was the last trump and wondered why they still were in their graves. But they talked together and it was not so bad at the first. But now they are frantic. They are in hell, and I have come to beseech you to see that they are moved far up on the hill. Ah, think, think, monsieur, what it is to have

the last long sleep of the grave so rudely disturbed--the sleep for which we live and endure so patiently!"

He stopped abruptly and caught his breath. The count had listened without change of countenance, convinced that he was facing a madman. But the farce wearied him, and involuntarily his hand had moved towards a bell on the table.

"Ah, monsieur, not yet! not yet!" panted the priest. "It is of the countess I came to speak. I had forgotten. She told me she wished to lie there and listen to the train go by to Paris, so I sprinkled no holy-water on her grave. But she, too, is wretched and horror-stricken, monsieur. She moans and screams. Her coffin is new and strong, and I cannot hear her words, but I have heard those frightful sounds from her grave to-night, monsieur; I swear it on the cross. Ah, monsieur, thou dost believe me at last!"

For the count, as white as the woman had been in her coffin, and shaking from head to foot, had staggered from his chair and was staring at the priest as if he saw the ghost of his countess.

"You heard--?" he gasped.

"She is not at peace, monsieur. She moans and shrieks in a terrible, smothered way, as if a hand were on her mouth--"

But he had uttered the last of his words. The count had suddenly recovered himself and dashed from the room. The priest passed his hand across his forehead and sank slowly to the floor.

"He will see that I spoke the truth," he thought, as he fell asleep, "and to-morrow he will intercede for my poor friends."

* * * * *

The priest lies high on the hill where no train will ever disturb him, and his old comrades of the violated cemetery are close about him. For the Count and Countess of Croisac, who adore his memory, hastened to give him in death what he most had desired in the last of his life. And with them all things are well, for a man, too, may be born again, and without descending into the grave.

THE OLD NURSE'S STORY

by Mrs. Gaskell, 1852

<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/Oldnurse.htm>

from **The works of Mrs. Gaskell: Cranford and other tales** (1906)

YOU know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child; and I dare say you have heard that your grandfather was a clergyman up in Westmoreland, where I come from. I was just a girl in the village school, when, one day, your grandmother came in to ask the mistress if there was any scholar there who would do for a nurse-maid; and mighty proud I was, I can tell ye, when the mistress called me up, and spoke to my being a good girl at my needle, and a steady, honest girl, and one whose parents were very respectable, though they might be poor. I thought I should like nothing better than to serve the pretty young lady, who was blushing as deep as I was, as she spoke of the coming baby, and what I should have to do with it. However, I see you don't care so much for this part of my story, as for what you think is to come, so I'll tell you at once. I was engaged and settled at the parsonage before Miss Rosamond (that was the baby, who is now your mother) was born. To be sure, I had little enough to do with her when she came, for she was never out of her mother's arms, and slept by her all night long; and proud enough was I sometimes when missis trusted her to me. There never was such a baby before or since, though you've all of you been fine enough in your turns; but for sweet, winning ways, you've none of you come up to your mother. She took after her mother, who was a real lady born; a Miss Furnivall, a grand-daughter of Lord Furnivall's, in Northumberland. I believe she had neither brother nor sister, and had been brought up in my lord's family till she had married your grandfather, who was just a curate, son to a shopkeeper in Carlisle--but a clever, fine gentleman as ever was--and one who was a right-down hard worker in his parish, which was very wide, and scattered all abroad over the Westmoreland Fells. When your mother, little Miss Rosamond, was about four or five years old, both her parents died in a fortnight--one after the other. Ah! that was a sad time. My pretty young mistress and me was looking for another baby, when my master came home from one of his long rides, wet and tired, and took the fever he died of; and then she never held up her head again, but just lived to see her dead baby, and have it laid on her breast, before she sighed away her life. My mistress had asked me, on her death-bed, never to leave Miss Rosamond; but if she had never spoken a word, I would have gone with the little child to the end of the world.

The next thing, and before we had well stilled our sobs, the executors and guardians came to settle the affairs. They were my poor young mistress's own cousin, Lord Furnivall, and Mr. Esthwaite, my master's brother, a shopkeeper in Manchester; not so well-to-do then as he was afterwards, and with a large family rising about him. Well! I don't know if it were their settling, or because of a letter my mistress wrote on her death-bed to her cousin, my lord; but somehow it was settled that Miss Rosamond and me were to go to Furnivall Manor House, in Northumberland; and my lord spoke as if it had been her mother's wish that she should live with his family, and as if he had no objections, for that one or two more or less could make no difference in so grand a household. So, though that was not the way in which I should have wished the coming of my bright and pretty pet to have been looked at--who was like a sunbeam in any family, be it never so grand--I was well pleased that all the folks in the Dale should stare and admire, when they heard I was going to be young lady's maid at my Lord Furnivall's at Furnivall Manor.

But I made a mistake in thinking we were to go and live where my lord did. It turned out that the family had left Furnivall Manor House fifty years or more. I could not hear that my poor young mistress had

ever been there, though she had been brought up in the family; and I was sorry for that, for I should have liked Miss Rosamond's youth to have passed where her mother's had been.

My lord's gentleman, from whom I asked as many questions as I durst, said that the Manor House was at the foot of the Cumberland Fells, and a very grand place; that an old Miss Furnivall, a great-aunt of my lord's, lived there, with only a few servants; but that it was a very healthy place, and my lord had thought that it would suit Miss Rosamond very well for a few years, and that her being there might perhaps amuse his old aunt.

I was bidden by my lord to have Miss Rosamond's things ready by a certain day. He was a stern, proud man, as they say all the Lords Furnivall were; and he never spoke a word more than was necessary. Folk did say he had loved my young mistress; but that, because she knew that his father would object, she would never listen to him, and married Mr. Esthwaite; but I don't know. He never married, at any rate. But he never took much notice of Miss Rosamond; which I thought he might have done if he had cared for her dead mother. He sent his gentleman with us to the Manor House, telling him to join him at Newcastle that same evening; so there was no great length of time for him to make us known to all the strangers before he, too, shook us off; and we were left, two lonely young things (I was not eighteen) in the great old Manor House. It seems like yesterday that we drove there. We had left our own dear parsonage very early, and we had both cried as if our hearts would break, though we were travelling in my lord's carriage, which I thought so much of once. And now it was long past noon on a September day, and we stopped to change horses for the last time at a little smoky town, all full of colliers and miners. Miss Rosamond had fallen asleep, but Mr. Henry told me to waken her, that she might see the park and the Manor House as we drove up. I thought it rather a pity; but I did what he bade me, for fear he should complain of me to my lord. We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large wild park--not like the parks here in the south, but with rocks, and the noise of running water, and gnarled thorn-trees, and old oaks, all white and peeled with age.

The road went up about two miles, and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew, and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place;--to lop the wood, or to keep the moss-covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough; and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old-fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterwards. A door opened out upon it from the west front; it had been scooped out of the thick, dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall; but the branches of the great forest-trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time.

When we drove up to the great front entrance, and went into the hall, I thought we should be lost--it was so large, and vast, and grand. There was a chandelier all of bronze, hung down from the middle of the ceiling; and I had never seen one before, and looked at it all in amaze. Then, at one end of the hall, was a great fireplace, as large as the sides of the houses in my country, with massy andirons and dogs to hold the wood; and by it were heavy, old-fashioned sofas. At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in--on the western side--was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end. Beyond it, on the same side, was a door; and opposite, on each side of the fireplace,

were also doors leading to the east front; but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can't tell you what lay beyond.

The afternoon was closing in, and the hall, which had no fire lighted in it, looked dark and gloomy; but we did not stay there a moment. The old servant, who had opened the door for us, bowed to Mr. Henry, and took us in through the door at the further side of the great organ, and led us through several smaller halls and passages into the west drawing-room, where he said that Miss Furnivall was sitting. Poor little Miss Rosamond held very tight to me, as if she were scared and lost in that great place; and as for myself, I was not much better. The west drawing-room was very cheerful-looking, with a warm fire in it, and plenty of good, comfortable furniture about. Miss Furnivall was an old lady not far from eighty, I should think, but I do not know. She was thin and tall, and had a face as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point. Her eyes were very watchful, to make up, I suppose, for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet. Sitting with her, working at the same great piece of tapestry, was Mrs. Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was. She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they both were young, and now she seemed more like a friend than a servant; she looked so cold, and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one; and I don't suppose she did care for any one, except her mistress; and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs. Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. Mr. Henry gave some message from my lord, and then he bowed good-bye to us all--taking no notice of my sweet little Miss Rosamond's outstretched hand--and left us standing there, being looked at by the two old ladies through their spectacles.

I was right glad when they rung for the old footman who had shown us in at first, and told him to take us to our rooms. So we went out of that great drawing-room, and into another sitting-room, and out of that, and then up a great flight of stairs, and along a broad gallery--which was something like a library, having books all down one side, and windows and writing-tables all down the other--till we came to our rooms, which I was not sorry to hear were just over the kitchens; for I began to think I should be lost in that wilderness of a house. There was an old nursery, that had been used for all the little lords and ladies long ago, with a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and the kettle boiling on the hob, and tea-things spread out on the table; and out of that room was the night-nursery, with a little crib for Miss Rosamond close to my bed. And old James called up Dorothy, his wife, to bid us welcome; and both he and she were so hospitable and kind, that by-and-by Miss Rosamond and me felt quite at home; and by the time tea was over, she was sitting on Dorothy's knee, and chattering away as fast as her little tongue could go. I soon found out that Dorothy was from Westmoreland, and that bound her and me together, as it were; and I would never wish to meet with kinder people than were old James and his wife. James had lived pretty nearly all his life in my lord's family, and thought there was no one so grand as they. He even looked down a little on his wife; because, till he had married her, she had never lived in any but a farmer's household. But he was very fond of her, as well he might be. They had one servant under them, to do all the rough work. Agnes they called her; and she and me, and James and Dorothy, with Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, made up the family; always remembering my sweet little Miss Rosamond! I used to wonder what they had done before she came, they thought so much of her now. Kitchen and drawing-room, it was all the same. The hard, sad Miss Furnivall, and the cold Mrs. Stark, looked pleased when she came fluttering in like a bird, playing and pranking hither and thither, with a continual murmur, and pretty prattle of gladness. I am sure, they were sorry many a time when she flitted away into the kitchen, though they were too proud to ask her to stay with them, and were a little surprised at her taste; though to be sure, as Mrs. Stark said, it was not to be wondered at, remembering what stock her father had come of. The great, old rambling house was a famous place for little Miss Rosamond. She made expeditions all over it, with me at her heels: all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going. But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant

room; full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them; but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old china jars and carved ivory boxes, and great heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures!

Once, I remember, my darling would have Dorothy go with us to tell us who they all were; for they were all portraits of some of my lord's family, though Dorothy could not tell us the names of every one. We had gone through most of the rooms, when we came to the old state drawing-room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall; or, as she was called in those days, Miss Grace, for she was the younger sister. Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how any one could have the impertinence to look at her, and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. She had a dress on, the like of which I had never seen before, but it was all the fashion when she was young: a hat of some soft white stuff like beaver, pulled a little over her brows, and a beautiful plume of feathers sweeping round it on one side; and her gown of blue satin was open in front to a quilted white stomacher.

"Well, to be sure!" said I, when I had gazed my fill. "Flesh is grass, they do say; but who would have thought that Miss Furnivall had been such an out-and-out beauty, to see her now?"

"Yes," said Dorothy. "Folks change sadly. But if what my master's father used to say was true, Miss Furnivall, the elder sister, was handsomer than Miss Grace. Her picture is here somewhere; but, if I show it you, you must never let on, even to James, that you have seen it. Can the little lady hold her tongue, think you?" asked she.

I was not so sure, for she was such a little sweet, bold, open-spoken child, so I set her to hide herself; and then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty; and I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me, and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamond, for that there were some ugly places about the house, where she should like ill for the child to go. I was a brave, high-spirited girl, and thought little of what the old woman said, for I liked hide-and-seek as well as any child in the parish; so off I ran to find my little one.

As winter drew on, and the days grew shorter, I was sometimes almost certain that I heard a noise as if some one was playing on the great organ in the hall. I did not hear it every evening; but, certainly, I did very often, usually when I was sitting with Miss Rosamond, after I had put her to bed, and keeping quite still and silent in the bedroom. Then I used to hear it booming and swelling away in the distance. The first night, when I went down to my supper, I asked Dorothy who had been playing music, and James said very shortly that I was a gowk to take the wind sighing among the trees for music; but I saw Dorothy look at him very fearfully, and Bessy, the kitchen-maid, said something beneath her breath, and went quite white. I saw they did not like my question, so I held my peace till I was with Dorothy alone, when I knew I could get a good deal out of her. So, the next day, I watched my time, and I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ; for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well enough, for all I had kept silence before James. But Dorothy had had her lesson, I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Bessy, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant. So she said I must never, never tell; and if ever told, I was never to say she had told me; but it was a very strange noise, and she

had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights, and before storms; and folks did say it was the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive; but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she either could not or would not tell me. Well! I told you I had a brave heart; and I thought it was rather pleasant to have that grand music rolling about the house, let who would be the player; for now it rose above the great gusts of wind, and wailed and triumphed just like a living creature, and then it fell to a softness most complete, only it was always music, and tunes, so it was nonsense to call it the wind. I thought at first, that it might be Miss Furnivall who played, unknown to Bessy; but one day, when I was in the hall by myself, I opened the organ and peeped all about it and around it, as I had done to the organ in Crosthwaite Church once before, and I saw it was all broken and destroyed inside, though it looked so brave and fine; and then, though it was noon-day, my flesh began to creep a little, and I shut it up, and run away pretty quickly to my own bright nursery; and I did not like hearing the music for some time after that, any more than James and Dorothy did. All this time Miss Rosamond was making herself more and more beloved. The old ladies liked her to dine with them at their early dinner James stood behind Miss Furnivall's chair, and I behind Miss Rosamond's all in state; and, after dinner, she would play about in a corner of the great drawing-room as still as any mouse, while Miss Furnivall slept, and I had my dinner in the kitchen. But she was glad enough to come to me in the nursery afterwards; for, as she said Miss Furnivall was so sad, and Mrs. Stark so dull; but she and were merry enough; and, by-and-by, I got not to care for that weird rolling music, which did one no harm, if we did not know where it came from.

That winter was very cold. In the middle of October the frosts began, and lasted many, many weeks. I remember one day, at dinner, Miss Furnivall lifted up her sad, heavy eyes, and said to Mrs. Stark, "I am afraid we shall have a terrible winter," in a strange kind of meaning way But Mrs. Stark pretended not to hear, and talked very loud of something else. My little lady and I did not care for the frost; not we! As long as it was dry, we climbed up the steep brows behind the house, and went up on the Fells which were bleak and bare enough, and there we ran races in the fresh, sharp air; and once we came down by a new path, that took us past the two old gnarled holly-trees, which grew about half-way down by the east side of the house. But the days grew shorter and shorter, and the old lord, if it was he, played away, more and more stormily and sadly, on the great organ. One Sunday afternoon--it must have been towards the end of November--I asked Dorothy to take charge of little missy when she came out of the drawing-room, after Miss Furnivall had had her nap; for it was too cold to take her with me to church, and yet I wanted to go, And Dorothy was glad enough to promise and was so fond of the child, that all seemed well; and Bessy and I set off very briskly, though the sky hung heavy and black over the white earth, as if the night had never fully gone away, and the air, though still, was very biting

"We shall have a fall of snow," said Bessy to me. And sure enough, even while we were in church, it came down thick, in great large flakes--so thick, it almost darkened the windows. It had stopped snowing before we came out, but it lay soft, thick, and deep beneath our feet, as we tramped home. Before we got to the hall, the moon rose, and I think it was lighter then--what with the moon, and what with the white dazzling snow--than it had been when we went to church, between two and three o'clock. I have not told you that Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark never went to church; they used to read the prayers together, in their quiet, gloomy way; they seemed to feel the Sunday very long without their tapestry-work to be busy at. So when I went to Dorothy in the kitchen, to fetch Miss Rosamond and take her upstairs with me, I did not much wonder when the old woman told me that the ladies had kept the child with them, and that she had never come to the kitchen, as I had bidden her, when she was tired of behaving pretty in the drawing-room. So I took off my things and went to find her, and bring her to her supper in the nursery. But when I went into the best drawing-room, there sat the two old ladies, very still and quiet, dropping out a word now and then, but looking as if nothing so bright and merry as Miss

Rosamond had ever been near them. Still I thought she might be hiding from me; it was one of her pretty ways,--and that she had persuaded them to look as if they knew nothing about her; so I went softly peeping under this sofa and behind that chair, making believe I was sadly frightened at not finding her.

"What's the matter, Hester?" said Mrs. Stark sharply. I don't know if Miss Furnivall had seen me for, as I told you, she was very deaf, and she sat quite still, idly staring into the fire, with her hopeless face. "I'm only looking for my little Rosy Posy," replied I, still thinking that the child was there, and near me, though I could not see her.

"Miss Rosamond is not here," said Mrs. Stark. "She went away, more than an hour ago, to find Dorothy." And she, too, turned and went on looking into the fire.

My heart sank at this, and I began to wish I had never left my darling. I went back to Dorothy and told her. James was gone out for the day, but she, and me, and Bessy took lights, and went up into the nursery first; and then we roamed over the great, large house, calling and entreating Miss Rosamond to come out of her hiding-place, and not frighten us to death in that way. But there was no answer; no sound.

"Oh!" said I, at last, "can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?"

But Dorothy said it was not possible, for that she herself had never been in there; that the doors were always locked, and my lord's steward had the keys, she believed; at any rate, neither she nor James had ever seen them: so I said I would go back, and see if, after all, she was not hidden in the drawing-room, unknown to the old ladies; and if I found her there, I said, I would whip her well for the fright she had given me; but I never meant to do it. Well, I went back to the west drawing-room, and I told Mrs. Stark we could not find her anywhere, and asked for leave to look all about the furniture there, for I thought now that she might have fallen asleep in some warm, hidden corner; but no! we looked--Miss Furnivall got up and looked, trembling all over--and she was nowhere there; then we set off again, every one in the house, and looked in all the places we had searched before, but we could not find her. Miss Furnivall shivered and shook so much, that Mrs. Stark took her back into the warm drawing-room; but not before they had made me promise to bring her to them when she was found. Well-a-day! I began to think she never would be found, when I bethought me to look into the great front court, all covered with snow. I was upstairs when I looked out; but, it was such clear moonlight, I could see, quite plain, two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall-door and round the corner of the east wing. I don't know how I got down, but I tugged open the great stiff hall-door, and, throwing the skirt of my gown over my head for a cloak, I ran out. I turned the east corner, and there a black shadow fell on the snow but when I came again into the moonlight, there were the little footmarks going up--up to the Fells. It was bitter cold; so cold, that the air almost took the skin off my face as I ran; but I ran on, crying to think how my poor little darling must be perished and frightened. I was within sight of the holly-trees, when I saw a shepherd coming down the hill, bearing something in his arms wrapped in his maul. He shouted to me, and asked me if I had lost a bairn; and, when I could not speak for crying, he bore towards me, and I saw my wee bairnie, lying still, and white, and stiff in his arms, as if she had been dead. He told me he had been up the Fells to gather in his sheep, before the deep cold of night came on, and that under the holly-trees (black marks on the hill-side, where no other bush was for miles around) he had found my little lady--my lamb--my queen--my darling--stiff and cold in the terrible sleep which is frost-begotten. Oh! the joy and the tears of having her in my arms once again I for I would not let him carry her; but took her, maul and all, into my own arms, and held her near my own warm neck and heart, and felt the

life stealing slowly back again into her little gentle limbs. But she was still insensible when we reached the hall, and I had no breath for speech. We went in by the kitchen-door

"Bring the warming-pan," said I; and I carried her upstairs, and began undressing her by the nursery fire, which Bessy had kept up. I called my little lammie all the sweet and playful names I could think of,--even while my eyes were blinded by my tears; and at last, oh! at length she opened her large blue eyes. Then I put her into her warm bed, and sent Dorothy down to tell Miss Furnivall that all was well; and I made up my mind to sit by my darling's bedside the live-long night. She fell away into a soft sleep as soon as her pretty head had touched the pillow, and I watched by her till morning light; when she wakened up bright and clear--or so I thought at first--and, my dears, so I think now.

She said, that she had fancied that she should like to go to Dorothy, for that both the old ladies were asleep, and it was very dull in the drawing-room; and that, as she was going through the west lobby, she saw the snow through the high window falling--falling--soft and steady; but she wanted to see it lying pretty and white on the ground; so she made her way into the great hall: and then, going to the window, she saw it bright and soft upon the drive; but while she stood there, she saw a little girl, not so old as she was, "but so pretty," said my darling; "and this little girl beckoned to me to come out; and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go." And then this other little girl had taken her by the hand, and side by side the two had gone round the east corner.

"Now you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories," said I. "What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond, if she heard her--and I dare say she does--telling stories!"

"Indeed, Hester," sobbed out my child, "I'm telling you true. Indeed I am."

"Don't tell me!" said I, very stern. "I tracked you by your foot-marks through the snow; there were only yours to be seen: and if you had had a little girl to go hand-in-hand with you up the hill, don't you think the footprints would have gone along with yours?"

"I can't help it, dear, dear Hester," said she, crying, "if they did not; I never looked at her feet, but she held my hand fast and tight in her little one, and it was very, very cold. She took me up the Fell-path, up to the holly-trees; and there I saw a lady weeping and crying; but when she saw me, she hushed her weeping, and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep, and that's all, Hester--but that is true; and my dear mamma knows it is," said she, crying. So I thought the child was in a fever, and pretended to believe her, as she went over her story--over and over again, and always the same. At last Dorothy knocked at the door with Miss Rosamond's breakfast; and she told me the old ladies were down in the eating parlour, and that they wanted to speak to me. They had both been into the night-nursery the evening before, but it was after Miss Rosamond was asleep; so they had only looked at her--not asked me any questions.

"I shall catch it," thought I to myself, as I went along the north gallery. "And yet," I thought, taking courage, "it was in their charge I left her; and it's they that's to blame for letting her steal away unknown and unwatched." So I went in boldly, and told my story. I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear; but when I came to the mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out, and wiling her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly-tree, she threw her arms up--her old and withered arms--and cried aloud, "Oh! Heaven forgive! Have mercy!"

Mrs. Stark took hold of her; roughly enough, I thought; but she was past Mrs. Stark's management, and spoke to me, in a kind of wild warning and authority.

"Hester! keep her from that child! It will lure her to her death! That evil child! Tell her it is a wicked, naughty child." Then, Mrs. Stark hurried me out of the room; where, indeed, I was glad enough to go; but Miss Furnivall kept shrieking out, "Oh, have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago"--

I was very uneasy in my mind after that. I durst never leave Miss Rosamond, night or day, for fear lest she might slip off again, after some fancy or other; and all the more, because I thought I could make out that Miss Furnivall was crazy, from their odd ways about her; and I was afraid lest something of the same kind (which might be in the family, you know) hung over my darling. And the great frost never ceased all this time; and, whenever it was a more stormy night than usual, between the gusts, and through the wind we heard the old lord playing on the great organ. But, old lord, or not, wherever Miss Rosamond went, there I followed; for my love for her, pretty, helpless orphan, was stronger than my fear for the grand and terrible sound. Besides, it rested with me to keep her cheerful and merry, as be seemed her age. So we played together, and wandered together, here and there, and everywhere; for I never dared to lose sight of her again in that large and rambling house. And so it happened, that one afternoon, not long before Christmas-day, we were playing together on the billiard-table in the great hall (not that we knew the right way of playing, but she liked to roll the smooth ivory balls with her pretty hands, and I liked to do whatever she did); and, by-and-by, without our noticing it, it grew dusk indoors, though it was still light in the open air, and I was thinking of taking her back into the nursery, when, all of a sudden, she cried out--

"Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!"

I turned towards the long narrow windows, and there, sure enough, I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond--dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night--crying, and beating against the window panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble; and all the more, when I remembered me that, even in the stillness of that dead-cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the phantom child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. Whether I remembered all this at the very moment, I do not know; the great organ sound had so stunned me into terror; but this I know, I caught up Miss Rosamond before she got the hall-door opened, and clutched her, and carried her away, kicking and screaming, into the large, bright kitchen, where Dorothy and Agnes were busy with their mince-pies.

"What is the matter with my sweet one?" cried Dorothy, as I bore in Miss Rosamond, who was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"She won't let me open the door for my little girl to come in; and she'll die if she is out on the Fells all night. Cruel, naughty Hester," she said, slapping me; but she might have struck harder, for I had seen a, look of ghastly terror on Dorothy's face, which made my very blood run cold.

"Shut the back-kitchen door fast, and bolt it well," said she to Agnes. She said no more; she gave me raisins and almonds to quiet Miss Rosamond; but she sobbed about the little girl in the snow, and would

not touch any of the good things. I was thankful when she cried herself to sleep in bed. Then I stole down to the kitchen, and told Dorothy I had made up my mind. I would carry my darling back to my father's house in Applethwaite; where, if we lived humbly, we lived at peace. I said I had been frightened enough with the old lord's organ-playing; but now that I had seen for myself this little moaning child, all decked out as no child in the neighbourhood could be, beating and battering to get in, yet always without any sound or noise--with the dark wound on its right shoulder; and that Miss Rosamond had known it again for the phantom that had nearly lured her to death (which Dorothy knew was true); I would stand it no longer.

I saw Dorothy change colour once or twice. When I had done, she told me she did not think I could take Miss Rosamond with me, for that she was my lord's ward, and I had no right over her; and she asked me would I leave the child that I was so fond of just for sounds and sights that could do me no harm; and that they had all had to get used to in their turns? I was all in a hot, trembling passion; and I said it was very well for her to talk, that knew what these sights and noises betokened, and that had, perhaps, had something to do with the spectre child while it was alive. And I taunted her so, that she told me all she knew at last; and then I wished I had never been told, for it only made me more afraid than ever.

She said she had heard the tale from old neighbours that were alive when she was first married; when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the country side: it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told.

The old lord was Miss Furnivall's father--Miss Grace, as Dorothy called her, for Miss Maude was the elder, and Miss Furnivall by lights. The old lord was eaten up with pride. Such a proud man was never seen or heard of; and his daughters were like him. No one was good enough to wed them, although they had choice enough; for they were the great beauties of their day, as I had seen by their portraits, where they hung in the state drawing-room. But, as the old saying is, "Pride will have a fall;" and these two haughty beauties fell in love with the same man, and he no better than a foreign musician, whom their father had down from London to play music with him at the Manor House. For, above all things, next to his pride, the old lord loved music. He could play on nearly every instrument that ever was heard of; and it was a strange thing it did not soften him; but he was a fierce, dour old man, and had broken his poor wife's heart with his cruelty, they said. He was mad after music, and would pay any money for it. So he got this foreigner to come; who made such beautiful music, that they said the very birds on the trees stopped their singing to listen. And, by degrees, this foreign gentleman got such a hold over the old lord, that nothing would serve him but that he must come every year; and it was he that had the great organ brought from Holland, and built up in the hall, where it stood now. He taught the old lord to play on it; but many and many a time, when Lord Furnivall was thinking of nothing but his fine organ, and his finer music, the dark foreigner was walking abroad in the woods, with one of the young ladies: now Miss Maude, and then Miss Grace.

Miss Maude won the day and carried off the prize, such as it was; and he and she were married, all unknown to any one; and, before he made his next yearly visit, she had been confined of a little girl at a farm-house on the Moors, while her father and Miss Grace thought she was away at Doncaster Races. But though she was a wife and a mother, she was not a bit softened, but as haughty and as passionate as ever; and perhaps more so, for she was jealous of Miss Grace, to whom her foreign husband paid a deal of court--by way of blinding her--as he told his wife. But Miss Grace triumphed over Miss Maude, and Miss Maude grew fiercer and fiercer, both with her husband and with her sister; and the former--who could easily shake off what was disagreeable, and hide himself in foreign countries--went away a month before his usual time that summer, and half-threatened that he would never come back again.

Meanwhile, the little girl was left at the farm-house, and her mother used to have her horse saddled and gallop wildly over the hills to see her once every week, at the very least; for where she loved she loved, and where she hated she hated. And the old lord went on playing--playing on his organ; and the servants thought the sweet music he made had soothed down his awful temper, of which (Dorothy said) some terrible tales could be told. He grew infirm too, and had to walk with a crutch; and his son--that was the present Lord Furnivall's father--was with the army in America, and the other son at sea; so Miss Maude had it pretty much her own way, and she and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day; till at last they hardly ever spoke, except when the old lord was by. The foreign musician came again the next summer, but it was for the last time; for they led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife, whom nobody knew to have been married, with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction; living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated. When the next summer passed over, and the dark foreigner never came, both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad; they had a haggard look about them, though they looked handsome as ever. But, by-and-by, Miss Maude brightened; for her father grew more and more infirm, and more than ever carried away by his music, and she and Miss Grace lived almost entirely apart, having separate rooms, the one on the west side, Miss Maude on the east--those very rooms which were now shut up. So she thought she might have her little girl with her, and no one need ever know except those who dared not speak about it, and were bound to believe that it was, as she said, a cottager's child she had taken a fancy to. All this, Dorothy said, was pretty well known; but what came afterwards no one knew, except Miss Grace and Mrs. Stark, who was even then her maid, and much more of a friend to her than ever her sister had been. But the servants supposed, from words that were dropped, that Miss Maude had triumphed over Miss Grace, and told her that all the time the dark foreigner had been mocking her with pretended love--he was her own husband. The colour left Miss Grace's cheek and lips that very day for ever, and she was heard to say many a time that sooner or later she would have her revenge; and Mrs. Stark was for ever spying about the east rooms.

One fearful night, just after the New Year had come in, when the snow was lying thick and deep; and the flakes were still falling--fast enough to blind any one who might be out and abroad--there was a great and violent noise heard, and the old lord's voice above all, cursing and swearing awfully, and the cries of a little child, and the proud defiance of a fierce woman, and the sound of a blow, and a dead stillness, and moans and wailings, dying away on the hill-side! Then the old lord summoned all his servants, and told them, with terrible oaths, and words more terrible, that his daughter had disgraced herself, and that he had turned her out of doors--her, and her child--and that if ever they gave her help, or food, or shelter, he prayed that they might never enter heaven. And, all the while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stone; and, when he had ended, she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished. But the old lord never touched his organ again, and died within the year; and no wonder I for, on the morrow of that wild and fearful night, the shepherds, coming down the Fell side, found Miss Maude sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly-trees, nursing a dead child, with a terrible mark on its right shoulder. "But that was not what killed it," said Dorothy: "it was the frost and the cold. Every wild creature was in its hole, and every beast in its fold, while the child and its mother were turned out to wander on the Fells! And now you know all! and I wonder if you are less frightened now?"

I was more frightened than ever; but I said I was not. I wished Miss Rosamond and myself well out of that dreadful house for ever; but I would not leave her, and I dared not take her away. But oh, how I watched her, and guarded her! We bolted the doors, and shut the window-shutters fast, an hour or

more before dark, rather than leave them open five minutes too late. But my little lady still heard the weird child crying and mourning; and not all we could do or say could keep her from wanting to go to her, and let her in from the cruel wind and snow. All this time I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, as much as ever I could; for I feared them--I knew no good could be about them, with their grey, hard faces, and their dreamy eyes, looking back into the ghastly years that were gone. But, even in my fear, I had a kind of pity for Miss Furnivall, at least. Those gone down to the pit can hardly have a more hopeless look than that which was ever on her face. At last I even got so sorry for her--who never said a word but what was quite forced from her--that I prayed for her; and I taught Miss Rosamond to pray for one who had done a deadly sin; but often, when she came to those words, she would listen, and start up from her knees, and say, "I hear my little girl plaining and crying, very sad,--oh, let her in, or she will die!"

One night--just after New Year's Day had come at last, and the long winter had taken a turn, as I hoped--I heard the west drawing-room bell ring three times, which was the signal for me. I would not leave Miss Rosamond alone, for all she was asleep--for the old lord had been playing wilder than ever--and I feared lest my darling should waken to hear the spectre child; see her I knew she could not. I had fastened the windows too well for that. So I took her out of her bed, and wrapped her up in such outer clothes as were most handy, and carried her down to the drawing-room, where the old ladies sat at their tapestry-work as usual. They looked up when I came in, and Mrs. Stark asked, quite astounded, "Why did I bring Miss Rosamond there, out of her warm bed?" I had begun to whisper, "Because I was afraid of her being tempted out while I was away, by the wild child in the snow," when she stopped me short (with a glance at Miss Furnivall), and said Miss Furnivall wanted me to undo some work she had done wrong, and which neither of them could see to unpick. So I laid my pretty dear on the sofa, and sat down on a stool by them, and hardened my heart against them, as I heard the wind rising and howling.

Miss Rosamond slept on sound, for all the wind blew so; and Miss Furnivall said never a word, nor looked round when the gusts shook the windows. All at once she started up to her full height, and put up one hand, as if to bid us listen.

"I hear voices!" said she. "I hear terrible screams--I hear my father's voice!"

Just at that moment my darling wakened with a sudden start: "My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!" and she tried to get up and go to her, but she got her feet entangled in the blanket, and I caught her up; for my flesh had begun to creep at these noises, which they heard while we could catch no sound. In a minute or two the noises came, and gathered fast, and filled our ears; we, too, heard voices and screams, and no longer heard the winter's wind that raged abroad. Mrs. Stark looked at me, and I at her, but we dared not speak. Suddenly Miss Furnivall went towards the door, out into the ante-room, through the west lobby, and opened the door into the great hall. Mrs. Stark followed, and I durst not be left, though my heart almost stopped beating for fear. I wrapped my darling tight in my arms, and went out with them. In the hall the screams were louder than ever; they seemed to come from the east wing--nearer and nearer--close on the other side of the locked-up doors--close behind them. Then I noticed that the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth-place, though it gave no heat; and I shuddered up with terror, and folded my darling closer to me. But as I did so the east door shook, and she, suddenly struggling to get free from me, cried, "Hester! I must go. My little girl is there I hear her; she is coming! Hester, I must go!"

I held her tight with all my strength; with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind. Miss Furnivall stood listening, and paid no regard to my

darling, who had got down to the ground, and whom I, upon my knees now, was holding with both my arms clasped round her neck; she still striving and crying to get free.

All at once, the east door gave way with a thundering crash, as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light, the figure of a tall old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman, with a little child clinging to her dress.

"O Hester! Hester!" cried Miss Rosamond; "it's the lady! the lady below the holly-trees; and my little girl is with her. Hester! Hester! let me go to her; they are drawing me to them. I feel them--I feel them. I must go!"

Again she was almost convulsed by her efforts to get away; but I held her tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt; but rather that than let her go towards those terrible phantoms. They passed along towards the great hall-door, where the winds howled and ravened for their prey; but before they reached that, the lady turned; and I could see that she defied the old man with a fierce and proud defiance; but then she quailed--and then she threw up her arms wildly and piteously to save her child--her little child--from a blow from his uplifted crutch.

And Miss Rosamond was torn as by a power stronger than mine, and writhed in my arms, and sobbed (for by this time the poor darling was growing faint).

"They want me to go with them on to the Fells--they are drawing me to them. Oh, my little girl! I would come, but cruel, wicked Hester holds me very tight." But when she saw the uplifted crutch, she swooned away, and I thanked God for it. Just at this moment--when the tall old man, his hair streaming as in the blast of a furnace, was going to strike the little shrinking child--Miss Furnivall, the old woman by my side, cried out, "O father! father! spare the little innocent child!" But just then I saw--we all saw--another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall; we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn. That figure was very beautiful to look upon, with a soft, white hat drawn down over the proud brows, and a red and curling lip. It was dressed in an open robe of blue satin. I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth; and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss Furnivall's wild entreaty,--and the uplifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony, and deadly serene. But at that moment, the dim lights, and the fire that gave no heat, went out of themselves, and Miss Furnivall lay at our feet stricken down by the palsy--death-stricken.

Yes! she was carried to her bed that night never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall, muttering low, but muttering always: "Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!"

(End.)

The Cold Embrace (1860)

by Mary E. Braddon

from **Ralph the bailiff, and other stories** (1861)

<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/coldembr.htm>

prepared by Eve M. Behr

HE was an artist--such things as happened to him happen sometimes to artists.

He was a German--such things as happened to him happen sometimes to Germans.

He was young, handsome, studious, enthusiastic, metaphysical, reckless, unbelieving, heartless.

And being young, handsome and eloquent, he was beloved.

He was an orphan, under the guardianship of his dead father's brother, his uncle Wilhelm, in whose house he had been brought up from a little child; and she who loved him was his cousin--his cousin Gertrude, whom he swore he loved in return.

Did he love her? Yes, when he first swore it. It soon wore out, this passionate love; how threadbare and wretched a sentiment it became at last in the selfish heart of the student! But in its golden dawn, when he was only nineteen, and had just returned from his apprenticeship to a great painter at Antwerp, and they wandered together in the most romantic outskirts of the city at rosy sunset, by holy moonlight, or bright and joyous morning, how beautiful a dream!

They keep it a secret from Wilhelm, as he has the father's ambition of a wealthy suitor for his only child--a cold and dreary vision beside the lover's dream.

So they are betrothed; and standing side by side when the dying sun and the pale rising moon divide the heavens, he puts the betrothal ring upon her finger, the white and taper finger whose slender shape he knows so well. This ring is a peculiar one, a massive golden serpent, its tail in its mouth, the symbol of eternity; it had been his mother's, and he would know it amongst a thousand. If he were to become blind tomorrow, he could select it from amongst a thousand by the touch alone.

He places it on her finger, and they swear to be true to each other for ever and ever--through trouble and danger--sorrow and change--in wealth or poverty. Her father must needs be won to consent to their union by and by, for they were now betrothed, and death alone could part them.

But the young student, the scoffer at revelation, yet the enthusiastic adorer of the mystical, asks:

"Can death part us? I would return to you from the grave, Gertrude. My soul would come back to be near my love. And you--you, if you died before me--the cold earth would not hold you from me; if you loved me, you would return, and again these fair arms would be clasped round my neck as they are now."

But she told him, with a holier light in her deep-blue eyes than had ever shone in his--she told him that the dead who die at peace with God are happy in heaven, and cannot return to the troubled earth; and

that it is only the suicide--the lost wretch on whom sorrowful angels shut the door of Paradise--whose unholy spirit haunts the footsteps of the living.

The first year of their betrothal is passed, and she is alone, for he has gone to Italy, on a commission for some rich man, to copy Raphaels, Titians, Guidos, in a gallery at Florence. He has gone to win fame, perhaps; but it is not the less bitter--he is gone!

Of course her father misses his young nephew, who has been as a son to him; and he thinks his daughter's sadness no more than a cousin should feel for a cousin's absence.

In the meantime, the weeks and months pass. The lover writes--often at first, then seldom--at last, not at all.

How many excuses she invents for him! How many times she goes to the distant little post-office, to which he is to address his letters! How many times she hopes, only to be disappointed! How many times she despairs, only to hope again!

But real despair comes at last, and will not be put off any more. The rich suitor appears on the scene, and her father is determined. She is to marry at once. The wedding-day is fixed--the fifteenth of June.

The date seems to burn into her brain.

The date, written in fire, dances for ever before her eyes.

The date, shrieked by the Furies, sounds continually in her ears.

But there is time yet--it is the middle of May--there is time for a letter to reach him at Florence; there is time for him to come to Brunswick, to take her away and marry her, in spite of her father--in spite of the whole world.

But the days and the weeks fly by, and he does not write--he does not come. This is indeed despair which usurps her heart, and will not be put away.

It is the fourteenth of June. For the last time she goes to the little post-office; for the last time she asked the old question, and they give her for the last time the dreary answer, "No; no letter."

For the last time--for tomorrow is the day appointed for the bridal. Her father will hear no entreaties; her rich suitor will not listen to her prayers. They will not be put off a day--an hour; to-night alone is hers--this night, which she may employ as she will.

She takes another path than that which leads home; she hurries through some by-streets of the city, out on to a lonely bridge, where he and she had stood so often in the sunset, watching the rose-coloured light glow, fade, and die upon the river.

* * * * *

He returns from Florence. He had received her letter. That letter, blotted with tears, entreating, despairing--he had received it, but he loved her no longer. A young Florentine, who has sat to him for a

model, had bewitched his fancy--that fancy which with him stood in place of a heart--and Gertrude had been half-forgotten. If she had a rich suitor, good; let her marry him; better for her, better far for himself. He had no wish to fetter himself with a wife. Had he not his art always?--his eternal bride, his unchanging mistress.

Thus he thought it wiser to delay his journey to Brunswick, so that he should arrive when the wedding was over--arrive in time to salute the bride.

And the vows--the mystical fancies--the belief in his return, even after death, to the embrace of his beloved? O, gone out of his life; melted away for ever, those foolish dreams of his boyhood.

So on the fifteenth of June he enters Brunswick, by that very bridge on which she stood, the stars looking down on her, the night before. He strolls across the bridge and down by the water's edge, a great rough dog at his heels, and the smoke from his short meerschaum-pipe curling in blue wreaths fantastically in the pure morning air. He has his sketch-book under his arm, and attracted now and then by some object that catches his artist's eye, stops to draw: a few weeds and pebbles on the river's brink--a crag on the opposite shore--a group of pollard willows in the distance. When he has done, he admires his drawing, shuts his sketch-book, empties the ashes from his pipe, refills from his tobacco-pouch, sings the refrain of a gay drinking-song, calls to his dog, smokes again, and walks on. Suddenly he opens his sketch-book again; this time that which attracts him is a group of figures: but what is it?

It is not a funeral, for there are no mourners.

It is not a funeral, but a corpse lying on a rude bier, covered with an old sail, carried between two bearers.

It is not a funeral, for the bearers are fishermen--fishermen in their everyday garb.

About a hundred yards from him they rest their burden on a bank--one stands at the head of the bier, the other throws himself down at the foot of it.

And thus they form the perfect group; he walks back two or three paces, selects his point of sight, and begins to sketch a hurried outline. He has finished it before they move; he hears their voices, though he cannot hear their words, and wonders what they can be talking of. Presently he walks on and joins them.

"You have a corpse there, my friends?" he says.

"Yes; a corpse washed ashore an hour ago."

"Drowned?"

"Yes, drowned. A young girl, very handsome."

"Suicides are always handsome," says the painter; and then he stands for a little while idly smoking and meditating, looking at the sharp outline of the corpse and the stiff folds of the rough canvas covering.

Life is such a golden holiday for him--young, ambitious, clever--that it seems as though sorrow and death could have no part in his destiny.

At last he says that, as this poor suicide is so handsome, he should like to make a sketch of her.

He gives the fishermen some money, and they offer to remove the sailcloth that covers her features.

No; he will do it himself. He lifts the rough, coarse, wet canvas from her face. What face?

The face that shone on the dreams of his foolish boyhood; the face which once was the light of his uncle's home. His cousin Gertrude--his betrothed!

He sees, as in one glance, while he draws one breath, the rigid features--the marble arms--the hands crossed on the cold bosom; and, on the third finger of the left hand, the ring which had been his mother's--the golden serpent; the ring which, if he were to become blind, he could select from a thousand others by the touch alone.

But he is a genius and a metaphysician--grief, true grief, is not for such as he. His first thought is flight--flight anywhere out of that accursed city--anywhere far from the brink of that hideous river--anywhere away from remorse--anywhere to forget.

* * * * *

He is miles on the road that leads away from Brunswick before he knows that he has walked a step.

It is only when his dog lies down panting at his feet that he feels how exhausted he is himself, and sits down upon a bank to rest. How the landscape spins round and round before his dazzled eyes, while his morning's sketch of the two fishermen and the canvas-covered bier glares redly at him out of the twilight.

At last, after sitting a long time by the roadside, idly playing with his dog, idly smoking, idly lounging, looking as any idle, light-hearted travelling student might look, yet all the while acting over that morning's scene in his burning brain a hundred times a minute; at last he grows a little more composed, and tries presently to think of himself as he is, apart from his cousin's suicide. Apart from that, he was no worse off than he was yesterday. His genius was not gone; the money he had earned at Florence still lined his pocket-book; he was his own master, free to go whither he would.

And while he sits on the roadside, trying to separate himself from the scene of that morning--trying to put away the image of the corpse covered with the damp canvas sail--trying to think of what he should do next, where he should go, to be farthest away from Brunswick and remorse, the old diligence coming rumbling and jingling along. He remembers it; it goes from Brunswick to Aix-la-Chapelle.

He whistles to the dog, shouts to the postillion to stop, and springs into the coupé.

During the whole evening, through the long night, though he does not once close his eyes, he never speaks a word; but when morning dawns, and the other passengers awake and begin to talk to each other, he joins in the conversation. He tells them that he is an artist, that he is going to Cologne and to Antwerp to copy Rubenses, and the great picture by Quentin Matsys, in the museum. He remembered

afterwards that he talked and laughed boisterously, and that when he was talking and laughing loudest, a passenger, older and graver than the rest, opened the window near him, and told him to put his head out. He remembered the fresh air blowing in his face, the singing of the birds in his ears, and the flat fields and roadside reeling before his eyes. He remembered this, and then falling in a lifeless heap on the floor of the diligence.

It is a fever that keeps him for six long weeks on a bed at a hotel in Aix-la-Chapelle.

He gets well, and, accompanied by his dog, starts on foot for Cologne. By this time he is his former self once more. Again the blue smoke from his short meerschaum curls upwards in the morning air--again he sings some old university drinking song--again stops here and there, meditating and sketching.

He is happy, and has forgotten his cousin--and so on to Cologne.

It is by the great cathedral he is standing, with his dog at his side. It is night, the bells have just chimed the hour, and the clocks are striking eleven; the moonlight shines full upon the magnificent pile, over which the artist's eye wanders, absorbed in the beauty of form.

He is not thinking of his drowned cousin, for he has forgotten her and is happy.

Suddenly some one, something from behind him, puts two cold arms round his neck, and clasps its hands on his breast.

And yet there is no one behind him, for on the flags bathed in the broad moonlight there are only two shadows, his own and his dog's. He turns quickly round--there is no one--nothing to be seen in the broad square but himself and his dog; and though he feels, he cannot see the cold arms clasped round his neck.

It is not ghostly, this embrace, for it is palpable to the touch--it cannot be real, for it is invisible.

He tries to throw off the cold caress. He clasps the hands in his own to tear them asunder, and to cast them off his neck. He can feel the long delicate fingers cold and wet beneath his touch, and on the third finger of the left hand he can feel the ring which was his mother's--the golden serpent--the ring which he has always said he would know among a thousand by the touch alone. He knows it now!

His dead cousin's cold arms are round his neck--his dead cousin's wet hands are clasped upon his breast. He asks himself if he is mad. "Up, Leo!" he shouts. "Up, up, boy!" and the Newfoundland leaps to his shoulders--the dog's paws are on the dead hands, and the animal utters a terrific howl, and springs away from his master.

The student stands in the moonlight, the dead arms around his neck, and the dog at a little distance moaning piteously.

Presently a watchman, alarmed by the howling of the dog, comes into the square to see what is wrong.

In a breath the cold arms are gone.

He takes the watchman home to the hotel with him and gives him money; in his gratitude he could have given the man half his little fortune.

Will it ever come to him again, this embrace of the dead?

He tries never to be alone; he makes a hundred acquaintances, and shares the chamber of another student. He starts up if he is left by himself in the public room of the inn where he is staying, and runs into the street. People notice his strange actions, and begin to think that he is mad.

But, in spite of all, he is alone once more; for one night the public room being empty for a moment, when on some idle pretence he strolls into the street, the street is empty too, and for the second time he feels the cold arms round his neck, and for the second time, when he calls his dog, the animal shrinks away from him with a piteous howl.

After this he leaves Cologne, still travelling on foot--of necessity now, for his money is getting low. He joins travelling hawkers, he walks side by side with labourers, he talks to every foot-passenger he falls in with, and tries from morning till night to get company on the road.

At night he sleeps by the fire in the kitchen of the inn at which he stops; but do what he will, he is often alone, and it is now a common thing for him to feel the cold arms around his neck.

Many months have passed since his cousin's death--autumn, winter, early spring. His money is nearly gone, his health is utterly broken, he is the shadow of his former self, and he is getting near to Paris. He will reach that city at the time of the Carnival. To this he looks forward. In Paris, in Carnival time, he need never, surely, be alone, never feel that deadly caress; he may even recover his lost gaiety, his lost health, once more resume his profession, once more earn fame and money by his art.

How hard he tries to get over the distance that divides him from Paris, while day by day he grows weaker, and his step slower and more heavy!

But there is an end at last; the long dreary roads are passed. This is Paris, which he enters for the first time--Paris, of which he has dreamed so much--Paris, whose million voices are to exorcise his phantom.

To him to-night Paris seems one vast chaos of lights, music, and confusion--lights which dance before his eyes and will not be still--music that rings in his ears and deafens him--confusion which makes his head whirl round and round.

But, in spite of all, he finds the opera-house, where there is a masked ball. He has enough money left to buy a ticket of admission, and to hire a domino to throw over his shabby dress. It seems only a moment after his entering the gates of Paris that he is in the very midst of all the wild gaiety of the opera-house ball.

No more darkness, no more loneliness, but a mad crowd, shouting and dancing, and a lovely Débardeuse hanging on his arm.

The boisterous gaiety he feels surely is his old light-heartedness come back. He hears the people round him talking of the outrageous conduct of some drunken student, and it is to him they point when they say this--to him, who has not moistened his lips since yesterday at noon, for even now he will not drink;

though his lips are parched, and his throat burning, he cannot drink. His voice is thick and hoarse, and his utterance indistinct; but still this must be his old light-heartedness come back that makes him so wildly gay.

The little Débardeuse is wearied out--her arm rests on his shoulder heavier than lead--the other dancers one by one drop off.

The lights in the chandeliers one by one die out.

The decorations look pale and shadowy in that dim light which is neither night nor day.

A faint glimmer from the dying lamps, a pale streak of cold grey light from the new-born day, creeping in through half-opened shutters.

And by this light the bright-eyed Débardeuse fades sadly. He looks her in the face. How the brightness of her eyes dies out! Again he looks her in the face. How white that face has grown! Again--and now it is the shadow of a face alone that looks in his.

Again--and they are gone--the bright eyes, the face, the shadow of the face. He is alone; alone in that vast saloon.

Alone, and, in the terrible silence, he hears the echoes of his own footsteps in that dismal dance which has no music.

No music but the beating of his breast. The cold arms are round his neck--they whirl him round, they will not be flung off, or cast away; he can no more escape from their icy grasp than he can escape from death. He looks behind him--there is nothing but himself in the great empty salle; but he can feel--cold, deathlike, but O, how palpable!--the long slender fingers, and the ring which was his mother's.

He tries to shout, but he has no power in his burning throat. The silence of the place is only broken by the echoes of his own footsteps in the dance from which he cannot extricate himself. Who says he has no partner? The cold hands are clasped on his breast, and now he does not shun their caress. No! One more polka, if he drops down dead.

The lights are all out, and, half an hour after, the gendarmes come in with a lantern to see that the house is empty; they are followed by a great dog that they have found seated howling on the steps of the theatre. Near the principal entrance they stumble over--

The body of a student, who has died from want of food, exhaustion, and the breaking of a blood-vessel.

(The End.)

A STRANGE ISLAND

by Louisa May Alcott

(1832-1888)

Originally from **Morning-Glories, and Other Stories** (1868)

<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/strngild.htm>

ONE day I lay rocking in my boat, reading a very famous book, which all children know and love; and the name of which I'll tell you by and by. So busily was I reading, that I never minded the tide; and presently discovered that I was floating out to sea, with neither sail nor oar. At first I was very much frightened; for there was no one in sight on land or sea, and I didn't know where I might drift to. But the water was calm, the sky clear, and the wind blew balmily; so I waited for what should happen.

Presently I saw a speck on the sea, and eagerly watched it; for it drew rapidly near, and seemed to be going my way. When it came closer, I was much amazed; for, of all the queer boats I ever saw, this was the queerest. It was a great wooden bowl, very cracked and old; and in it sat three gray-headed little gentlemen with spectacles, all reading busily, and letting the boat go where it pleased. Now, right in their way was a rock; and I called out, "Sir, sir, take care."

But my call came too late: crash went the bowl, out came the bottom, and down plumped all the little gentlemen into the sea. I tried not to laugh, as the books, wigs, and spectacles flew about; and, urging my boat nearer, I managed to fish them up, dripping and sneezing, and looking like drowned kittens. When the flurry was over, and they had got their breath, I asked who they were, and where they were going.

"We are from Gotham, ma'am," said the fattest one wiping a very wet face on a very wet handkerchief. "We were going to that island yonder. We have often tried, but never got there: it's always so, and I begin to think the thing can't be done."

I looked where he pointed; and, sure enough, there was an island where I had never seen one before. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. Yes: there it was, — a little island, with trees and people on it; for I saw smoke coming out of the chimney of a queerly-shaped house on the shore.

"What is the name of it?" I asked.

The little old gentleman put his finger on his lips, and said, with a mysterious nod:

"I couldn't tell you, ma'am. It's a secret; but, if you manage to land there, you will soon know."

The other old men nodded at the same time; and then all went to reading again, with the water still dropping off the ends of their noses. This made me very curious; and, as the tide drifted us nearer and nearer, I looked well about me, and saw several things that filled me with a strong desire to land on the island. The odd house, I found, was built like a high-heeled shoe; and at every window I saw children's heads. Some were eating broth; some were crying; and some had nightcaps on. I caught sight of a distracted old lady flying about, with a ladle in one hand, and a rod in the other; but the house was so full of children (even up to the sky-light, — out of which they popped their heads, and nodded at me) that I couldn't see much of the mamma of this large family: one seldom can, you know.

I had hardly got over my surprise at this queer sight, when I saw a cow fly up through the air, over the new moon that hung there, and come down and disappear in the woods. I really didn't know what to make of this, but had no time to ask the old men what it meant; for a cat, playing a fiddle, was seen on the shore. A little dog stood by, listening and laughing; while a dish and a spoon ran away over the beach with all their might. If the boat had not floated up to the land, I think I should have swam there, — I was so anxious to see what was going on; for there was a great racket on the island, and such a remarkable collection of creatures, it was impossible to help staring.

As soon as we landed, three other gentlemen came to welcome the ones I had saved, and seemed very glad to see them. They appeared to have just landed from a tub in which was a drum, rub-a-dub-dubbing all by itself. One of the new men had a white frock on, and carried a large knife; the second had dough on his hands, flour on his coat, and a hot-looking face; the third was very greasy, had a bundle of candles under his arm, and a ball of wicking half out of his pocket. The six shook hands, and walked away together, talking about a fair; and left me to take care of myself.

I walked on through a pleasant meadow, where a pretty little girl was looking sadly up at a row of sheep's tails hung on a tree. I also saw a little boy in blue, asleep by a hay-cock; and another boy taking aim at a cock-sparrow, who clapped his wings and flew away. Presently I saw two more little girls: one sat by a fire warming her toes; and, when I asked what her name was, she said pleasantly:

"Pony Flinders, ma'am."

The other one sat on a tuft of grass, eating some thing that looked very nice; but, all of a sudden, she dropped her bowl, and ran away, looking very much frightened.

"What's the matter with her?" I asked of a gay young frog who came tripping along with his hat under his arm.

"Miss Muffit is a fashionable lady, and afraid of spiders, madam; also of frogs." And he puffed himself angrily up, till his eyes quite goggled in his head.

"And, pray, who are you, sir?" I asked, staring at his white vest, green coat, and fine cravat.

"Excuse me, if I don't give my name, ma'am. My false friend, the rat, got me into a sad scrape once; and Rowley insists upon it that a duck destroyed me, which is all gammon, ma'am, — all gammon."

With that, the frog skipped away; and I turned into a narrow lane, which seemed to lead toward some music. I had not gone far, when I heard the rumbling of a wheelbarrow, and saw a little man wheeling a little woman along. The little man looked very hot and tired; but the little woman looked very nice, in a smart bonnet and shawl, and kept looking at a new gold ring on her finger, as she rode along under her little umbrella. I was wondering who they were, when down went the wheelbarrow; and the little lady screamed so dismally that I ran away, lest I should get into trouble, — being a stranger.

Turning a corner, I came upon a very charming scene, and slipped into a quiet nook to see what was going on. It was evidently a wedding; and I was just in time to see it, for the procession was passing at that moment. First came a splendid cock-a-doodle, all in black and gold, like a herald, blowing his trumpet, and marching with a very dignified step. Then came a rook, in black, like a minister, with

spectacles and white cravat. A lark and bullfinch followed, — friends, I suppose; and then the bride and bridegroom. Miss Wren was evidently a Quakeress; for she wore a sober dress, and a little white veil, through which her bright eyes shone. The bridegroom was a military man, in his scarlet uniform, — a plump, bold-looking bird, very happy and proud just then. A goldfinch gave away the bride, and a linnet was bridesmaid. The ceremony was very fine; and, as soon as it was over, the blackbird, thrush and nightingale burst out in a lovely song.

A splendid dinner followed, at which was nearly every bird that flies; so you may imagine the music there was. They had currant-pie in abundance; and cherry-wine, which excited a cuckoo so much, that he became quite rude, and so far forgot himself as to pull the bride about. This made the groom so angry that he begged his friend, the sparrow, to bring his bow and arrow, and punish the ruffian. But, alas! Sparrow had also taken a drop too much: he aimed wrong, and, with a dreadful cry, Mr. Robin sank dying into the arms of his wife, little Jane.

It was too much for me; and, taking advantage of the confusion that followed, I left the tragical scene as fast as possible.

A little farther on, I was shocked to see a goose dragging an old man down some steps that led to a little house.

"Dear me! What's the matter here?" I cried.

"He won't say his prayers," screamed the goose.

"But perhaps he was never taught," said I.

"It's never too late to learn: he's had his chance; he won't be pious and good, so away with him. Don't interfere, whatever you do: hold your tongue, and go about your business," scolded the goose who certainly had a dreadful temper.

I dared say no more; and, when the poor old man had been driven away by this foul proceeding, I went up the steps and peeped in; for I heard some one crying, and thought the cross bird, perhaps, had hurt some one else. A little old woman stood there, wringing her hands in great distress; while a small dog was barking at her with all his might.

"Bless me! The fashions have got even here," thought I; for the old woman was dressed in the latest style, — or, rather, she had overdone it sadly; for her gown was nearly up to her knees, and she was nearly as ridiculous an object as some of the young ladies I had seen at home. She had a respectable bonnet on, however, instead of a straw saucer; and her hair was neatly put under a cap, — not made into a knob on the top of her head.

"My dear soul, what's the trouble?" said I, quite touched by her tears.

"Lud a mercy, ma'am! I've been to market with my butter and eggs, — for the price of both is so high, one can soon get rich now-a-days, — and, being tired, I stopped to rest a bit, but fell asleep by the road. Somebody — I think it's a rogue of a peddler who sold me wooden nutmegs, and a clock that wouldn't go, and some pans that came to bits the first time I used them — somebody cut my new gown and petticoat off all round, in the shameful way you see. I thought I never should get home; for I was such a

fright, I actually didn't know myself. But, thinks I, my doggy will know me; and then I shall be sure I'm I, and not some boldfaced creature in short skirts. But, oh, ma'am! Doggy don't know me; and I ain't myself, and I don't know what to do."

"He's a foolish little beast; so don't mind him, but have a cup of tea, and go to bed. You can make your gown decent to-morrow; and, if I see the tricky peddler, I'll give him a scolding."

This seemed to comfort the old woman; though doggy still barked.

"My next neighbor has a dog who never behaves in this way," she said, as she put her teapot on the coals. "He's a remarkable beast; and you'd better stop to see him as you pass, ma'am. He's always up to some funny prank or other."

I said I would; and, as I went by the next house, I took a look in at the window. The closet was empty, I observed; but the dog sat smoking a pipe, looking as grave as a judge.

"Where is your mistress?" asked I.

"Gone for some tripe," answered the dog, politely taking the pipe out of his mouth, and adding, "I hope the smoke doesn't annoy you."

"I don't approve of smoking," said I.

"Sorry to hear it," said the dog, coolly.

I was going to lecture him on this bad habit; but I saw his mistress coming with a dish in her hand, and, fearing she might think me rude to peep in at her windows, I walked on, wondering what we were coming to when even four-legged puppies smoked.

At the door of the next little house, I saw a market-wagon loaded with vegetables, and a smart young pig just driving it away. I had heard of this interesting family, and took a look as I passed by. A second tidy pig sat blowing the fire; and a third was eating roast-beef, as if he had just come in from his work. The fourth, I was grieved to see, looked very sulky; for it was evident he had been naughty, and so lost his dinner. The little pig was at the door, crying to get in; and it was sweet to see how kindly the others let him in, wiped his tears, tied on his bib, and brought him his bread and milk. I was very glad to see these young orphans doing so well, and I knew my friends at home would enjoy hearing from them.

A loud scream made me jump; and the sudden splash of water made me run along, without stopping to pick up a boy and girl who came tumbling down the hill with an empty pail, bumping their heads as they rolled. Smelling something nice, and feeling hungry, I stepped into a large room near by, — a sort of eating-house, I fancy; for various parties seemed to be enjoying themselves in their different ways. A small boy sat near the door, eating a large pie; and he gave me a fine plum which he had just pulled out. At one table was a fat gentleman cutting another pie, which had a dark crust, through which appeared the heads of a flock of birds, all singing gayly.

"There's no end to the improvements in cooking, and no accounting for tastes," I added, looking at a handsomely-dressed lady, who sat near, eating bread and honey.

As I passed this party, I saw behind the lady's chair a maid, with a clothes-pin in her hand, and no nose. She sobbingly told me a bird had nipped it off; and I gave her a bit of court-plaster, which I fortunately had in my pocket.

Another couple were dividing their meat in a queer way; for one took all the fat, and the other all the lean. The next people were odder still; for the man looked rather guilty, and seemed to be hiding a three-peck measure under his chair, while he waited for his wife to bring on some cold barley-pudding, which, to my surprise, she was frying herself. I also

saw a queer moonstruck-looking man inquiring the way to Norridge; and another man making wry faces over some plum-pudding, with which he had burnt his mouth, because his friend came down too soon.

I ordered pease-porridge hot, and they brought it cold; but I didn't wait for any thing else, being in a hurry to see all there was to be seen on this strange island. Feeling refreshed, I strolled on, passing a jolly old gentleman smoking and drinking while three fiddlers played before him. As I turned into a road that led toward a hill, a little boy, riding a dapple-gray pony, and an old lady on a white horse, with bells ringing somewhere, trotted by me, followed by a little girl, who wished to know where she could buy a penny bun. I told her the best were at Newmarch's, in Bedford Street, and she ran on, much pleased; but I'm afraid she never found that best of bake-shops. I was going quietly along, when the sound of another horse coming made me look round; and there I saw a dreadful sight, — a wild horse, tearing over the ground, with fiery eyes and streaming tail. On his back sat a crazy man, beating him with a broom; a crazy woman was behind him, with her bonnet on wrong side before, holding one crazy child in her lap, while another stood on the horse; a third was hanging on by one foot, and all were howling at the top of their voices as they rushed by. I scrambled over the wall to get out of the way, and there I saw more curious sights. Two blind men were sitting on the grass, trying to see two lame men who were hobbling along as hard as they could; and, near by, a bull was fighting a bee in the most violent manner. This rather alarmed me; and I scrambled back into the road again, just as a very fine lady jumped over a barberry-bush near by, and a gentleman went flying after, with a ring in one hand and a stick in the other.

"What very odd people they have here!" I thought. Close by was a tidy little house under the hill, and in it a tidy little woman who sold things to eat. Being rather hungry, in spite of my porridge, I bought a baked apple and a cranberry-pie; for she said they were good, and I found she told the truth. As I sat eating my pie, some dogs began to bark; and by came a troop of beggars, some in rags, and some in old velvet gowns. A drunken grenadier was with them, who wanted a pot of beer; but as he had no money, the old woman sent him about his business.

On my way up the hill, I saw a little boy crying over a dead pig, and his sister, who seemed to be dead also. I asked his name, and he sobbed out, "Johnny Pringle, ma'am;" and went on crying so hard I could do nothing to comfort him. While I stood talking to him, a sudden gust of wind blew up the road, and down came the bough of a tree; and, to my surprise, a cradle with a baby in it also. The baby screamed dreadfully, and I didn't know how to quiet it; so I ran back to the old woman, and left it with her, asking if that was the way babies were taken care of there.

"Bless you, my dear! It's ma is making patty-cakes; and put it up there to be out of the way of Tom Tinker's dog. I'll soon hush it up," said the old woman; and, trotting it on her knee, she began to sing:

"Hey! My kitten, my kitten,
Hey! My kitten, any deary."

Feeling that the child was in good hands, I hurried away, for I saw something was going on upon the hill-top. When I got to the hill-top, I was shocked to find some people tossing an old woman in a blanket. I begged them to stop; but one of the men, who, I found, was a Welchman, by the name of Taffy, told me the old lady liked it.

"But why does she like it?" I asked in great surprise.

"Tom, the piper's son, will tell you: it's my turn to toss now," said the man.

"Why, you see, ma'am," said Tom, "she is one of those dreadfully nice old women, who are always fussing and scrubbing, and worrying people to death, with everlastingly cleaning house. Now and then we get so tired out with her that we propose to her to clean the sky itself. She likes that; and, as this is the only way we can get her up, we toss till she sticks somewhere, and then leave her to sweep cobwebs till she is ready to come back and behave herself."

"Well, that is the oddest thing I ever heard. I know just such an old lady, and when I go home I'll try your plan. It seems to me that you have a great many queer old ladies on this island," I said to another man, whom they called Peter, and who stood eating pumpkin all the time.

"Well, we do have rather a nice collection; but you haven't seen the best of all. We expect her every minute; and Margery Daw is to let us know the minute she lights on the island," replied Peter, with his mouth full.

"Lights?" said I, "you speak as if she flew."

"She rides on a bird. Hurrah! The old sweeper has lit. Now the cobwebs will fly. Don't hurry back," shouted the man; and a faint, far-off voice answered, "I shall be back again by and by."

The people folded up the blanket, looking much relieved; and I was examining a very odd house which was built by an ancient king called Boggen, when Margery Daw, a dirty little girl, came up the hill, screaming, at the top of her voice:

"She's come! She's come!"

Every one looked up; and I saw a large white bird slowly flying over the island. On its back sat the nicest old woman that ever was seen: all the others were nothing compared to her. She had a pointed hat on over her cap, a red cloak, high-heeled shoes, and a crutch in her hand. She smiled and nodded as the bird approached; and every one ran and nodded, and screamed, "Welcome! Welcome, mother!"

As soon as she touched the ground, she was so surrounded that I could only see the top of her hat; for hundreds and hundreds of little children suddenly appeared, like a great flock of birds, — rosy, happy, pretty children; but all looked unreal, and among them I saw some who looked like little people I had known long ago.

"Who are they?" I asked of a bonny lass, who was sitting on a cushion, eating strawberries and cream.

"They are the phantoms of all the little people who ever read and loved our mother's songs," said the maid.

"What did she write?" I asked, feeling very queer, and as if I was going to remember something.

"Songs that are immortal; and you have them in your hand," replied the bonny maid, smiling at my stupidity.

I looked; and there, on the cover of the book I had been reading so busily when the tide carried me away, I saw the words "Mother Goose's Melodies." I was so delighted that I had seen her I gave a shout, and tried to get near enough to hug and kiss the dear old soul, as the swarm of children were doing; but my cry woke me, and I was so sorry to find it all a dream!

(End.)

THE ENSOULED VIOLIN

by Mme. Blavatsky

originally from **Nightmare Tales** (1892)

an enlarged version of the 1880 story of the same name written in collaboration with Master Hillmarion.

I

In the year 1828, an old German, a music teacher, came to Paris with his pupil and settled unostentatiously in one of the quiet faubourgs of the metropolis. The first rejoiced in the name of Samuel Klaus; the second answered to the more poetical appellation of Franz Stenio. The younger man was a violinist, gifted, as rumor went, with extraordinary, almost miraculous talent. Yet as he was poor and had not hitherto made a name for himself in Europe, he remained for several years in the capital of France — the heart and pulse of capricious continental fashion — unknown and unappreciated. Franz was a Styrian by birth, and, at the time of the event to be presently described, he was a young man considerably under thirty. A philosopher and a dreamer by nature, imbued with all the mystic oddities of true genius, he reminded one of some of the heroes in Hoffmann's *Contes Fantastiques*. His earlier existence had been a very unusual, in fact, quite an eccentric one, and its history must be briefly told — for the better understanding of the present story.

Born of very pious country people, in a quiet burg among the Styrian Alps; nursed "by the native gnomes who watched over his cradle"; growing up in the weird atmosphere of the ghouls and vampires who play such a prominent part in the household of every Styrian and Slavonian in Southern Austria; educated later, as a student, in the shadow of the old Rhenish castles of Germany; Franz from his childhood had passed through every emotional stage on the plane of the so-called "supernatural." He had also studied at one time the "occult arts" with an enthusiastic disciple of Paracelsus and Khunrath; alchemy had few theoretical secrets for him; and he had dabbled in "ceremonial magic" and "sorcery" with some Hungarian Tziganes. Yet he loved above all else music, and above music — his violin.

At the age of twenty-two he suddenly gave up his practical studies in the occult, and from that day, though as devoted as ever in thought to the beautiful Grecian Gods, he surrendered himself entirely to his art. Of his classic studies he had retained only that which related to the muses — Euterpe especially, at whose altar he worshipped — and Orpheus whose magic lyre he tried to emulate with his violin. Except his dreamy belief in the nymphs and the sirens, on account probably of the double relationship of the latter to the muses through Calliope and Orpheus, he was interested but little in the matters of this sublunary world. All his aspirations mounted, like incense, with the wave of the heavenly harmony that he drew from his instrument, to a higher and nobler sphere. He dreamed awake, and lived a real though an enchanted life only during those hours when his magic bow carried him along the wave of sound to the Pagan Olympus, to the feet of Euterpe. A strange child he had ever been in his own home, where tales of magic and witchcraft grow out of every inch of the soil; a still stranger boy he had become, until finally he had blossomed into manhood, without one single characteristic of youth. Never had a fair face attracted his attention; not for one moment had his thoughts turned from his solitary studies to a life beyond that of a mystic Bohemian. Content with his own company, he had thus passed the best years of his youth and manhood with his violin for his chief idol, and with the Gods and Goddesses of old Greece

for his audience, in perfect ignorance of practical life. His whole existence had been one long day of dreams, of melody and sunlight, and he had never felt any other aspirations.

How useless, but oh, how glorious those dreams! how vivid! and why should he desire any better fate? Was he not all that he wanted to be, transformed in a second of thought into one or another hero; from Orpheus, who held all nature breathless, to the urchin who piped away under the plane tree to the naiads of Callirrhoe's crystal fountain? Did not the swift-footed nymphs frolic at his beck and call to the sound of the magic flute of the Arcadian shepherd — who was himself? Behold, the Goddess of Love and Beauty herself descending from on high, attracted by the sweet-voiced notes of his violin! . . . Yet there came a time when he preferred Syrinx to Aphrodite — not as the fair nymph pursued by Pan, but after her transformation by the merciful Gods into the reed out of which the frustrated God of the Shepherds had made his magic pipe. For also, with time, ambition grows and is rarely satisfied. When he tried to emulate on his violin the enchanting sounds that resounded in his mind, the whole of Parnassus kept silent under the spell, or joined in heavenly chorus; but the audience he finally craved was composed of more than the Gods sung by Hesiod, verily of the most appreciative *mélomanes* of European capitals. He felt jealous of the magic pipe, and would fain have had it at his command.

"Oh! that I could allure a nymph into my beloved violin!" — he often cried, after awakening from one of his day-dreams. "Oh, that I could only span in spirit-flight the abyss of Time! Oh, that I could find myself for one short day a partaker of the secret arts of the Gods, a God myself, in the sight and hearing of enraptured humanity; and, having learned the mystery of the lyre of Orpheus, or secured within my violin a siren, thereby benefit mortals to my own glory!

Thus, having for long years dreamed in the company of the Gods of his fancy, he now took to dreaming of the transitory glories of fame upon this earth. But at this time he was suddenly called home by his widowed mother from one of the German universities where he had lived for the last year or two. This was an event which brought his plans to an end, at least so far as the immediate future was concerned, for he had hitherto drawn upon her alone for his meagre pittance, and his means were not sufficient for an independent life outside his native place.

His return had a very unexpected result. His mother, whose only love he was on earth, died soon after she had welcomed her Benjamin back; and the good wives of the burg exercised their swift tongues for many a month after as to the real causes of that death.

Frau Stenio, before Franz's return, was a healthy, buxom, middle-aged body, strong and hearty. She was a pious and a God-fearing soul too, who had never failed in saying her prayers, nor had missed an early mass for years during his absence. On the first Sunday after her son had settled at home — a day that she had been longing for and had anticipated for months in joyous visions, in which she saw him kneeling by her side in the little church on the hill — she called him from the foot of the stairs. The hour had come when her pious dream was to be realized, and she was waiting for him, carefully wiping the dust from the prayer-book he had used in his boyhood. But instead of Franz, it was his violin that responded to her call, mixing its sonorous voice with the rather cracked tones of the peal of the merry Sunday bells. The fond mother was somewhat shocked at hearing the prayer-inspiring sounds drowned by the weird, fantastic notes of the "Dance of the Witches"; they seemed to her so unearthly and mocking. But she almost fainted upon hearing the definite refusal of her well-beloved son to go to church. He never went to church, he coolly remarked. It was loss of time; besides which, the loud peals of the old church organ jarred on his nerves. Nothing should induce him to submit to the torture of

listening to that cracked organ. He was firm, and nothing could move him. To her supplications and remonstrances he put an end by offering to play for her a "Hymn to the Sun" he had just composed.

From that memorable Sunday morning, Frau Stenio lost her usual serenity of mind. She hastened to lay her sorrows and seek for consolation at the foot of the confessional; but that which she heard in response from the stern priest filled her gentle and unsophisticated soul with dismay and almost with despair. A feeling of fear, a sense of profound terror which soon became a chronic state with her, pursued her from that moment; her nights became disturbed and sleepless, her days passed in prayer and lamentations. In her maternal anxiety for the salvation of her beloved son's soul, and for his post-mortem welfare, she made a series of rash vows. Finding that neither the Latin petition to the Mother of God written for her by her spiritual adviser, nor yet the humble supplications in German, addressed by herself to every saint she had reason to believe was residing in Paradise, worked the desired effect, she took to pilgrimages to distant shrines. During one of these journeys to a holy chapel situated high up in the mountains, she caught cold, amidst the glaciers of the Tyro, and redescended only to take to a sick bed, from which she arose no more. Frau Stenio's vow had led her, in one sense, to the desired result. The poor woman was now given an opportunity of seeking out in propria persona the saints she had believed in so well, and of pleading face to face for the recreant son, who refused adherence to them and to the Church, scoffed at monk and confessional, and held the organ in such horror.

Franz sincerely lamented his mother's death. Unaware of being the indirect cause of it, he felt no remorse; but selling the modest household goods and chattels, light in purse and heart, he resolved to travel on foot for a year or two, before settling down to any definite profession.

A hazy desire to see the great cities of Europe, and to try his luck in France, lurked at the bottom of this travelling project, but his Bohemian habits of life were too strong to be abruptly abandoned. He placed his small capital with a banker for a rainy day, and started on his pedestrian journey via Germany and Austria. His violin paid for his board and lodging in the inns and farms on his way, and he passed his days in the green fields and in the solemn silent woods, face to face with Nature, dreaming all the time as usual with his eyes open. During the three months of his pleasant travels to and fro, he never descended for one moment from Parnassus; but, as an alchemist transmutes lead into gold, so he transformed everything on his way into a song of Hesiod or Anacreon. Every evening, while fiddling for his supper and bed, whether on a green lawn or in the hall of a rustic inn, his fancy changed the whole scene for him. Village swains and maidens became transfigured into Arcadian shepherds and nymphs. The sand-covered floor was now a green sward; the uncouth couples spinning round in a measured waltz with the wild grace of tamed bears became priests and priestesses of Terpsichore; the bulky, cherry-cheeked and blue-eyed daughters of rural Germany were the Hesperides circling around the trees laden with the golden apples. Nor did the melodious strains of the Arcadian demi-gods piping on their syringes, and audible but to his own enchanted ear, vanish with the dawn. For no sooner was the curtain of sleep raised from his eyes than he would sally forth into a new magic realm of day-dreams. On his way to some dark and solemn pine forest, he played incessantly, to himself and to everything else. He fiddled to the green hill, and forthwith the mountain and the moss-covered rocks moved forward to hear him the better, as they had done at the sound of the Orphean lyre. He fiddled to the merry-voiced brook, to the hurrying river, and both slackened their speed and stopped their waves, and, becoming silent, seemed to listen to him in an entranced rapture. Even the long-legged stork who stood meditatively on one leg on the thatched top of the rustic mill, gravely resolving unto himself the problem of his too-long existence, sent out after him a long and strident cry, screeching, "Art thou Orpheus himself, O Stenio?" It was a period of full bliss, of a daily and almost hourly exaltation. The last words of his dying mother, whispering to him of the horrors of eternal condemnation, had left him unaffected, and the only vision

her warning evoked in him was that of Pluto. By a ready association of ideas, he saw the lord of the dark nether kingdom greeting him as he had greeted the husband of Eurydice before him. Charmed with the magic sounds of his violin, the wheel of Ixion was at a standstill once more, thus affording relief to the wretched seducer of Juno, and giving the lie to those who claim eternity for the duration of the punishment of condemned sinners. He perceived Tantalus forgetting his never-ceasing thirst, and smacking his lips as he drank in the heaven-born melody; the stone of Sisyphus becoming motionless, the Furies themselves smiling on him, and the sovereign of the gloomy regions delighted, and awarding preference to his violin over the lyre of Orpheus. Taken au sérieux, mythology thus seems a decided antidote to fear, in the face of theological threats, especially when strengthened with an insane and passionate love of music; with Franz, Euterpe proved always victorious in every contest, aye, even with Hell itself!

But there is an end to everything, and very soon Franz had to give up uninterrupted dreaming. He had reached the university town where dwelt his old violin teacher, Samuel Klaus. When this antiquated musician found that his beloved and favourite pupil, Franz, had been left poor in purse and still poorer in earthly affections, he felt his strong attachment to the boy awoken with tenfold force. He took Franz to his heart, and forthwith adopted him as his son.

The old teacher reminded people of one of those grotesque figures which look as if they had just stepped out of some mediæval panel. And yet Klaus, with his fantastic allures of a night-goblin, had the most loving heart, as tender as that of a woman, and the self-sacrificing nature of an old Christian martyr. When Franz had briefly narrated to him the history of his last few years, the professor took him by the hand, and leading him into his study simply said:

"Stop with me, and put an end to your Bohemian life. Make yourself famous. I am old and childless and will be your father. Let us live together and forget all save fame."

And forthwith he offered to proceed with Franz to Paris, via several large German cities, where they would stop to give concerts.

In a few days Klaus succeeded in making Franz forget his vagrant life and its artistic independence, and reawakened in his pupil his now dormant ambition and desire for worldly fame. Hitherto, since his mother's death, he had been content to receive applause only from the Gods and Goddesses who inhabited his vivid fancy; now he began to crave once more for the admiration of mortals. Under the clever and careful training of old Klaus his remarkable talent gained in strength and powerful charm with every day, and his reputation grew and expanded with every city and town wherein he made himself heard. His ambition was being rapidly realized; the presiding genii of various musical centres to whose patronage his talent was submitted soon proclaimed him the one violinist of the day, and the public declared loudly that he stood unrivalled by any one whom they had ever heard. These laudations very soon made both master and pupil completely lose their heads. But Paris was less ready with such appreciation. Paris makes reputations for itself, and will take none on faith. They had been living in it for almost three years, and were still climbing with difficulty the artist's Calvary, when an event occurred which put an end even to their most modest expectations. The first arrival of Nicolo Paganini was suddenly heralded, and threw Lutetia into a convulsion of expectation. The unparalleled artist arrived, and — all Paris fell at once at his feet.

Now it is a well-known fact that a superstition born in the dark days of mediæval superstition, and surviving almost to the middle of the present century, attributed all such abnormal, out-of-the-way talent as that of Paganini to "supernatural" agency. Every great and marvellous artist had been accused in his day of dealings with the devil. A few instances will suffice to refresh the reader's memory.

Tartini, the great composer and violinist of the XVIIIth century, was denounced as one who got his best inspirations from the Evil One, with whom he was, it was said, in regular league. This accusation was, of course, due to the almost magical impression he produced upon his audiences. His inspired performance on the violin secured for him in his native country the title of "Master of Nations." The *Sonate du Diable*, also called "Tartini's Dream" — as every one who has heard it will be ready to testify — is the most weird melody ever heard or invented: hence, the marvellous composition has become the source of endless legends. Nor were they entirely baseless, since it was he, himself; who was shown to have originated them. Tartini confessed to having written it on awakening from a dream, in which he had heard his sonata performed by Satan, for his benefit, and in consequence of a bargain made with his infernal majesty.

Several famous singers, even, whose exceptional voices struck the hearers with superstitious admiration, have not escaped a like accusation. Pasta's splendid voice was attributed in her day to the fact that three months before her birth, the diva's mother was carried during a trance to heaven, and there treated to a vocal concert of seraphs. Malibran was indebted for her voice to St. Cecilia, while others said she owed it to a demon who watched over her cradle and sang the baby to sleep. Finally, Paganini — the unrivalled performer, the mean Italian, who like Dryden's Jubal striking on the "chorded shell" forced the throngs that followed him to worship the divine sounds produced, and made people say that "less than a God could not dwell within the hollow of his violin" — Paganini left a legend too.

The almost supernatural art of the greatest violin-player that the world has ever known was often speculated upon, never understood. The effect produced by him on his audience was literally marvellous, overpowering. The great Rossini is said to have wept like a sentimental German maiden on hearing him play for the first time. The Princess Elisa of Lucca, a sister of the great Napoleon, in whose service Paganini was, as director of her private orchestra, for a long time was unable to hear him play without fainting. In women he produced nervous fits and hysterics at his will; stout-hearted men he drove to frenzy. He changed cowards into heroes and made the bravest soldiers feel like so many nervous schoolgirls. Is it to be wondered at, then, that hundreds of weird tales circulated for long years about and around the mysterious Genoese, that modern Orpheus of Europe? One of these was especially ghastly. It was rumoured, and was believed by more people than would probably like to confess it, that the strings of his violin were made of human intestines, according to all the rules and requirements of the Black Art.

Exaggerated as this idea may seem to some, it has nothing impossible in it; and it is more than probable that it was this legend that led to the extraordinary events which we are about to narrate. Human organs are often used by the Eastern Black Magician, so-called, and it is an averred fact that some Bengâlî Tântrikas (reciters of tantras, or "invocations to the demon," as a reverend writer has described them) use human corpses, and certain internal and external organs pertaining to them, as powerful magical agents for bad purposes.

However this may be, now that the magnetic and mesmeric potencies of hypnotism are recognized as facts by most physicians, it may be suggested with less danger than heretofore that the extraordinary effects of Paganini's violin-playing were not, perhaps, entirely due to his talent and genius. The wonder and awe he so easily excited were as much caused by his external appearance, "which had something weird and demoniacal in it," according to certain of his biographers, as by the inexpressible charm of his execution and his remarkable mechanical skill. The latter is demonstrated by his perfect imitation of the flageolet, and his performance of long and magnificent melodies on the G string alone. In this performance, which many an artist has tried to copy without success, he remains unrivalled to this day.

It is owing to this remarkable appearance of his — termed by his friends eccentric, and by his too nervous victims, diabolical — that he experienced great difficulties in refuting certain ugly rumours. These were credited far more easily in his day than they would be now. It was whispered throughout Italy, and even in his own native town, that Paganini had murdered his wife, and, later on, a mistress, both of whom he had loved passionately, and both of whom he had not hesitated to sacrifice to his fiendish ambition. He had made himself proficient in magic arts, it was asserted, and had succeeded thereby in imprisoning the souls of his two victims in his violin — his famous Cremona.

It is maintained by the immediate friends of Ernest T.W. Hoffmann, the celebrated author of *Die Elixire des Teufels*, *Meister Martin*, and other charming and mystical tales, that Councillor Crespel, in the Violin of Cremona, was taken from the legend about Paganini. It is, as all who have read it know, the history of a celebrated violin, into which the voice and the soul of a famous diva, a woman whom Crespel had loved and killed, had passed, and to which was added the voice of his beloved daughter, Antonia.

Nor was this superstition utterly ungrounded, nor was Hoffmann to be blamed for adopting it, after he had heard Paganini's playing. The extraordinary facility with which the artist drew out of his instrument, not only the most unearthly sounds, but positively human voices, justified the suspicion. Such effects might well have startled an audience and thrown terror into many a nervous heart. Add to this the impenetrable mystery connected with a certain period of Paganini's youth, and the most wild tales about him must be found in a measure justifiable, and even excusable; especially among a nation whose ancestors knew the Borgias and the Medicis of Black Art fame.

III

In those pre-telegraphic days, newspapers were limited, and the wings of fame had a heavier flight than they have now.

Franz had hardly heard of Paganini; and when he did, he swore he would rival, if not eclipse, the Genoese magician. Yes, he would either become the most famous of all living violinists, or he would break his instrument and put an end to his life at the same time.

Old Klaus rejoiced at such a determination. He rubbed his hands in glee, and jumping about on his lame leg like a crippled satyr, he flattered and incensed his pupil, believing himself all the while to be performing a sacred duty to the holy and majestic cause of art.

Upon first setting foot in Paris, three years before, Franz had all but failed. Musical critics pronounced him a rising star, but had all agreed that he required a few more years' practice, before he could hope to

carry his audiences by storm. Therefore, after a desperate study of over two years and uninterrupted preparations, the Styrian artist had finally made himself ready for his first serious appearance in the great Opera House where a public concert before the most exacting critics of the old world was to be held; at this critical moment Paganini's arrival in the European metropolis placed an obstacle in the way of the realization of his hopes, and the old German professor wisely postponed his pupil's début. At first he had simply smiled at the wild enthusiasm, the laudatory hymns sung about the Genoese violinist, and the almost superstitious awe with which his name was pronounced. But very soon Paganini's name became a burning iron in the hearts of both the artists. and a threatening phantom in the mind of Klaus. A few days more, and they shuddered at the very mention of their great rival, whose success became with every night more unprecedented.

The first series of concerts was over, but neither Klaus nor Franz had as yet had an opportunity of hearing him and of judging for themselves. So great and so beyond their means was the charge for admission, and so small the hope of getting a free pass from a brother artist justly regarded as the meanest of men in monetary transactions, that they had to wait for a chance, as did so many others. But the day came when neither master nor pupil could control their impatience any longer; so they pawned their watches, and with the proceeds bought two modest seats.

Who can describe the enthusiasm, the triumphs, of this famous and at the same time fatal night! The audience was frantic; men wept and women screamed and fainted; while both Klaus and Stenio sat looking paler than two ghosts. At the first touch of Paganini's magic bow, both Franz and Samuel felt as if the icy hand of death had touched them. Carried away by an irresistible enthusiasm, which turned into a violent, unearthly mental torture, they dared neither look into each other's faces, nor exchange one word during the whole performance.

At midnight, while the chosen delegates of the Musical Societies and the Conservatory of Paris unhitched the horses, and dragged the carriage of the grand artist home in triumph, the two Germans returned to their modest lodging and it was a pitiful sight to see them. Mournful and desperate, they placed themselves in their usual seats at the fire corner, and neither for a while opened his mouth

"Samuel!" at last exclaimed Franz, pale as death itself. "Samuel — it remains for us now but to die! . . . Do you hear me? . . . We are worthless! We were two madmen to have ever hoped that any one in this world would ever rival . . . him!"

The name of Paganini stuck in his throat, as in utter despair he fell into his arm chair.

The old professor's wrinkles suddenly became purple. His little greenish eyes gleamed phosphorescently as, bending toward his pupil, he whispered to him in hoarse and broken tones:

"Nein, nein! Thou art wrong, my Franz! I have taught thee, and thou hast learned all of the great art that a simple mortal, and a Christian by baptism, can learn from another simple mortal. Am I to blame because these accursed Italians, in order to reign unequalled in the domain of art, have recourse to Satan and the diabolical effects of Black Magic?"

Franz turned his eyes upon his old master. There was a sinister light burning in those glittering orbs; a light telling plainly, that, to secure such a power, he, too, would not scruple to sell himself, body and soul, to the Evil One.

But he said not a word, and, turning his eyes from his old master's face, he gazed dreamily at the dying embers.

The same long-forgotten incoherent dreams, which, after seeming such realities to him in his younger days, had been given up entirely, and had gradually faded from his mind, now crowded back into it with the same force and vividness as of old. The grimacing shades of Ixion, Sisyphus and Tantalus resurrected and stood before him, saying:

"What matters hell — in which thou believest not. And even if hell there be, it is the hell described by the old Greeks, not that of the modern bigots — a locality full of conscious shadows, to whom thou canst be a second Orpheus."

Franz felt that he was going mad, and, turning instinctively, he looked his old master once more right in the face. Then his bloodshot eye evaded the gaze of Klaus.

Whether Samuel understood the terrible state of mind of his pupil, or whether he wanted to draw him out, to make him speak, and thus to divert his thoughts, must remain as hypothetical to the reader as it is to the writer. Whatever may have been in his mind, the German enthusiast went on, speaking with a feigned calmness:**

"Franz, my dear boy, I tell you that the art of the accursed Italian is not natural; that it is due neither to study nor to genius. It never was acquired in the usual, natural way. You need not stare at me in that wild manner, for what I say is in the mouth of millions of people. Listen to what I now tell you, and try to understand. You have heard the strange tale whispered about the famous Tartini? He died one fine Sabbath night, strangled by his familiar demon, who had taught him how to endow his violin with a human voice, by shutting up in it, by means of incantations, the soul of a young virgin. Paganini did more. In order to endow his instrument with the faculty of emitting human sounds, such as sobs, despairing cries, supplications, moans of love and fury — in short, the most heart-rending notes of the human voice — Paganini became the murderer not only of his wife and his mistress, but also of a friend, who was more tenderly attached to him than any other being on this earth. He then made the four chords of his magic violin out of the intestines of his last victim. This is the secret of his enchanting talent, of that overpowering melody, that combination of sounds, which you will never be able to master, unless . . ."

The old man could not finish the sentence. He staggered back before the fiendish look of his pupil, and covered his face with his hands.

Franz was breathing heavily, and his eyes had an expression which reminded Klaus of those of a hyena. His pallor was cadaverous. For some time he could not speak, but only gasped for breath. At last he slowly muttered:

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am, as I hope to help you."

"And . . . and do you really believe that had I only the means of obtaining human intestines for strings, I could rival Paganini?" asked Franz, after a moment's pause, and casting down his eyes.

The old German unveiled his face, and, with a strange look of determination upon it, softly answered:

"Human intestines alone are not sufficient for our purpose; they must have belonged to some one who had loved us well, with an unselfish holy love. Tartini endowed his violin with the life of a virgin; but that virgin had died of unrequited love for him. The fiendish artist had prepared beforehand a tube, in which he managed to catch her last breath as she expired, pronouncing his beloved name, and he then transferred this breath to his violin. As to Paganini I have just told you his tale. It was with the consent of his victim, though, that he murdered him to get possession of his intestines.

"Oh, for the power of the human voice!" Samuel went on, after a brief pause. "What can equal the eloquence, the magic spell of the human voice? Do you think, my poor boy, I would not have taught you this great, this final secret, were it not that it throws one right into the clutches of him . . . who must remain unnamed at night?" he added, with a sudden return to the superstitions of his youth.

Franz did not answer; but with a calmness awful to behold, he left his place, took down his violin from the wall where it was hanging, and, with one powerful grasp of the chords, he tore them out and flung them into the fire.

Samuel suppressed a cry of horror. The chords were hissing upon the coals, where, among the blazing logs, they wriggled and curled like so many living snakes.

"By the witches of Thessaly and the dark arts of Circe!" he exclaimed, with foaming mouth and his eyes burning like coals; "by the Furies of Hell and Pluto himself, I now swear, in thy presence, O Samuel, my master, never to touch a violin again until I can string it with four human chords. May I be accursed for ever and ever if I do!"

He fell senseless on the floor, with a deep sob, that ended like a funeral wail; old Samuel lifted him up as he would have lifted a child, and carried him to his bed. Then he sallied forth in search of a physician.

IV

For several days after this painful scene Franz was very ill, ill almost beyond recovery. The physician declared him to be suffering from brain fever and said that the worst was to be feared. For nine long days the patient remained delirious; and Klaus, who was nursing him night and day with the solicitude of the tenderest mother, was horrified at the work of his own hands. For the first time since their acquaintance began, the old teacher, owing to the wild ravings of his pupil, was able to penetrate into the darkest corners of that weird, superstitious, cold, and, at the same time, passionate nature; and — he trembled at what he discovered. For he saw that which he had failed to perceive before — Franz as he was in reality, and not as he seemed to superficial observers. Music was the life of the young man, and adulation was the air he breathed, without which that life became a burden; from the chords of his violin alone, Stenio drew his life and being, but the applause of men and even of Gods was necessary to its support. He saw unveiled before his eyes a genuine, artistic, earthly soul, with its divine counterpart totally absent, a son of the Muses, all fancy and brain poetry, but without a heart. While listening to the ravings of that delirious and unhinged fancy Klaus felt as if he were for the first time in his long life exploring a marvellous and untravelled region, a human nature not of this world but of some incomplete

planet. He saw all this, and shuddered. More than once he asked himself whether it would not be doing a kindness to his "boy" to let him die before he returned to consciousness.

But he loved his pupil too well to dwell for long on such an idea. Franz had bewitched his truly artistic nature, and now old Klaus felt as though their two lives were inseparably linked together. That he could thus feel was a revelation to the old man; so he decided to save Franz, even at the expense of his own old, and, as he thought, useless life.

The seventh day of the illness brought on a most terrible crisis. For twenty-four hours the patient never closed his eyes, nor remained for a moment silent; he raved continuously during the whole time. His visions were peculiar, and he minutely described each. Fantastic, ghastly figures kept slowly swimming out of the penumbra of his small, dark room, in regular and uninterrupted procession, and he greeted each by name as he might greet old acquaintances. He referred to himself as Prometheus, bound to the rock by four bands made of human intestines. At the foot of the Caucasian Mount the black waters of the river Styx were running . . . They had deserted Arcadia, and were now endeavouring to encircle within a sevenfold embrace the rock upon which he was suffering . . .

"Wouldst thou know the name of the Promethean rock, old man?" he roared into his adopted father's ear . . . "Listen then . . . its name is . . . called . . . Samuel Klaus . . ."

"Yes, yes! . . ." the German murmured disconsolately. "It is I who killed him, while seeking to console. The news of Paganini's magic arts struck his fancy too vividly . . . Oh, my poor, poor boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" The patient broke into a loud and discordant laugh. "Aye, poor old man, sayest thou? . . . So, so, thou art of poor stuff, anyhow, and wouldst look well only when stretched upon a fine Cremona violin! . . ."

Klaus shuddered, but said nothing. He only bent over the poor maniac, and with a kiss upon his brow, a caress as tender and as gentle as that of a doting mother, he left the sickroom for a few instants, to seek relief in his own garret. When he returned, the ravings were following another channel. Franz was singing, trying to imitate the sounds of a violin.

Toward the evening of that day, the delirium of the sick man became perfectly ghastly. He saw spirits of fire clutching at his violin. Their skeleton hands, from each finger of which grew a flaming claw, beckoned to old Samuel . . . They approached and surrounded the old master, and were preparing to rip him open . . . him, "the only man on this earth who loves me with an unselfish, holy love, and . . . whose intestines can be of any good at all!" he went on whispering, with glaring eyes and demon laugh . . .

By the next morning, however, the fever had disappeared, and by the end of the ninth day Stenio had left his bed, having no recollection of his illness, and no suspicion that he had allowed Klaus to read his inner thought. Nay; had he himself any knowledge that such a horrible idea as the sacrifice of his old master to his ambition had ever entered his mind? Hardly. The only immediate result of his fatal illness was, that as, by reason of his vow, his artistic passion could find no issue, another passion awoke, which might avail to feed his ambition and his insatiable fancy. He plunged headlong into the study of the Occult Arts, of Alchemy and of Magic. In the practice of Magic the young dreamer sought to stifle the voice of his passionate longing for his, as he thought, forever lost violin . . .

Weeks and months passed away, and the conversation about Paganini was never resumed between the master and the pupil. But a profound melancholy had taken possession of Franz, the two hardly exchanged a word, the violin hung mute, chordless, full of dust, in its habitual place. It was as the presence of a soulless corpse between them.

The young man had become gloomy and sarcastic, even avoiding the mention of music. Once, as his old professor, after long hesitation, took out his own violin from its dust-covered case and prepared to play, Franz gave a convulsive shudder, but said nothing. At the first notes of the bow, however, he glared like a madman, and rushing out of the house, remained for hours, wandering in the streets. Then old Samuel in his turn threw his instrument down, and locked himself up in his room till the following morning.

One night as Franz sat, looking particularly pale and gloomy, old Samuel suddenly jumped from his seat, and after hopping about the room in a magpie fashion, approached his pupil, imprinted a fond kiss upon the young man's brow, and squeaked at the top of his shrill voice:

"Is it not time to put an end to all this?" . . .

Whereupon, starting from his usual lethargy, Franz echoed, as in a dream:

"Yes, it is time to put an end to this."

Upon which the two separated, and went to bed.

On the following morning, when Franz awoke, he was astonished not to see his old teacher in his usual place to greet him. But he had greatly altered during the last few months, and he at first paid no attention to his absence, unusual as it was. He dressed and went into the adjoining room, a little parlour where they had their meals, and which separated their two bedrooms. The fire had not been lighted since the embers had died out on the previous night, and no sign was anywhere visible of the professor's busy hand in his usual housekeeping duties. Greatly puzzled, but in no way dismayed, Franz took his usual place at the corner of the now cold fire-place, and fell into an aimless reverie. As he stretched himself in his old arm-chair, raising both his hands to clasp them behind his head in a favourite posture of his, his hand came into contact with something on a shelf at his back; he knocked against a case, and brought it violently on the ground.

It was old Klaus' violin-case that came down to the floor with such a sudden crash that the case opened and the violin fell out of it, rolling to the feet of Franz. And then the chords, striking against the brass fender emitted a sound, prolonged, sad and mournful as the sigh of an unrestful soul; it seemed to fill the whole room, and reverberated in the head and the very heart of the young man. The effect of that broken violin-string was magical.

"Samuel!" cried Stenio, with his eyes starting from their sockets, and an unknown terror suddenly taking possession of his whole being. "Samuel! what has happened? . . . My good, my dear old master!" he called out, hastening to the professor's little room, and throwing the door violently open. No one answered, all was silent within.

He staggered back, frightened at the sound of his own voice, so changed and hoarse it seemed to him at this moment. No reply came in response to his call. Naught followed but a dead silence . . . that stillness which, in the domain of sounds, usually denotes death. In the presence of a corpse, as in the

lugubrious stillness of a tomb, such silence acquires a mysterious power, which strikes the sensitive soul with a nameless terror . . . The little room was dark, and Franz hastened to open the shutters.

Samuel was lying on his bed, cold, stiff, and lifeless . . . At the sight of the corpse of him who had loved him so well, and had been to him more than a father, Franz experienced a dreadful revulsion of feeling, a terrible shock. But the ambition of the fanatical artist got the better of the despair of the man, and smothered the feelings of the latter in a few seconds.

A note bearing his own name was conspicuously placed upon a table near the corpse. With trembling hand, the violinist tore open the envelope, and read the following:

MY BELOVED SON, FRANZ,

When you read this, I shall have made the greatest sacrifice, that your best and only friend and teacher could have accomplished for your fame. He, who loved you most, is now but an inanimate lump of clay. Of your old teacher there now remains but a clod of cold organic matter. I need not prompt you as to what you have to do with it. Fear not stupid prejudices. It is for your future fame that I have made an offering of my body, and you would be guilty of the blackest ingratitude were you now to render useless this sacrifice. When you shall have replaced the chords upon your violin, and these chords a portion of my own self, under your touch it will acquire the power of that accursed sorcerer, all the magic voices of Paganini's instrument. You will find therein my voice, my sighs and groans, my song of welcome, the prayerful sobs of my infinite and sorrowful sympathy, my love for you. And now, my Franz, fear nobody! Take your instrument with you, and dog the steps of him who filled our lives with bitterness and despair! . . . Appear in every arena, where, hitherto, he has reigned without a rival, and bravely throw the gauntlet of defiance in his face. O Franz! then only wilt thou hear with what a magic power the full notes of unselfish love will issue forth from thy violin. Perchance, with a last caressing touch of its chords, thou wilt remember that they once formed a portion of thine old teacher, who now embraces and blesses thee for the last time.

SAMUEL.

Two burning tears sparkled in the eyes of Franz, but they dried up instantly. Under the fiery rush of passionate hope and pride, the two orbs of the future magician-artist, riveted to the ghastly face of the dead man, shone like the eyes of a demon.

Our pen refuses to describe that which took place on that day, after the legal inquiry was over. As another note, written with the view of satisfying the authorities, had been prudently provided by the loving care of the old teacher, the verdict was, "Suicide from causes unknown"; after this the coroner and the police retired, leaving the bereaved heir alone in the death room, with the remains of that which had once been a living man.

Scarcely a fortnight had elapsed from that day, ere the violin had been dusted, and four new, stout strings had been stretched upon it. Franz dared not look at them. He tried to play, but the bow trembled in his hand like a dagger in the grasp of a novice-brigand. He then determined not to try again, until the portentous night should arrive, when he should have a chance of rivalling, nay, of surpassing, Paganini.

The famous violinist had meanwhile left Paris, and was giving a series of triumphant concerts at an old Flemish town in Belgium.

V

One night, as Paganini, surrounded by a crowd of admirers, was sitting in the dining-room of the hotel at which he was staying, a visiting card, with a few words written on it in pencil, was handed to him by a young man with wild and staring eyes.

Fixing upon the intruder a look which few persons could bear, but receiving back a glance as calm and determined as his own, Paganini slightly bowed, and then dryly said:

"Sir, it shall be as you desire. Name the night. I am at your service."

On the following morning the whole town was startled by the appearance of bills posted at the corner of every street, and bearing the strange notice:

On the night of . . . , at the Grand Theatre of . . . , and for the first time, will appear before the public, Franz Stenio, a German violinist, arrived purposely to throw down the gauntlet to the world. famous Paganini and to challenge him to a duel — upon their violins. He purposes to compete with the great "virtuoso" in the execution of the most difficult of his compositions. The famous Paganini has accepted the challenge. Franz Stenio will play, in competition with the unrivalled violinist, the celebrated "Fantaisie Caprice" of the latter, known as "The Witches."

The effect of the notice was magical. Paganini, who, amid his greatest triumphs, never lost sight of a profitable speculation, doubled the usual price of admission, but still the theatre could not hold the crowds that flocked to secure tickets for that memorable performance.

At last the morning of the concert day dawned, and the "duel" was in everyone's mouth. Franz Stenio, who, instead of sleeping, had passed the whole long hours of the preceding midnight in walking up and down his room like an encaged panther, had, toward morning, fallen on his bed from mere physical exhaustion. Gradually he passed into a deathlike and dreamless slumber. At the gloomy winter dawn he awoke, but finding it too early to rise he fell asleep again. And then he had a vivid dream — so vivid indeed, so lifelike, that from its terrible realism he felt sure that it was a vision rather than a dream.

He had left his violin on a table by his bedside, locked in its case, the key of which never left him. Since he had strung it with those terrible chords he never let it out of his sight for a moment. In accordance with his resolution he had not touched it since his first trial, and his bow had never but once touched the human strings, for he had since always practised on another instrument. But now in his sleep he saw himself looking at the locked case. Something in it was attracting his attention, and he found himself incapable of detaching his eyes from it. Suddenly he saw the upper part of the case slowly rising, and, within the chink thus produced, he perceived two small, phosphorescent green eyes — eyes but too familiar to him — fixing themselves on his, lovingly, almost beseechingly. Then a thin, shrill voice, as if issuing from these ghastly orbs — the voice and orbs of Samuel Klaus himself — resounded in Stenio's horrified ear, and he heard it say:

"Franz, my beloved boy . . . Franz, I cannot, no I cannot separate myself from . . . them!"

And "they" twanged piteously inside the case.

Franz stood speechless, horror-bound. He felt his blood actually freezing, and his hair moving and standing erect on his head . . .

"It's but a dream, an empty dream!" he attempted to formulate in his mind.

"I have tried my best, Franzchen . . . I have tried my best to sever myself from these accursed strings, without pulling them to pieces . . ." pleaded the same shrill, familiar voice. "Wilt thou help me to do so? . . ."

Another twang, still more prolonged and dismal, resounded within the case, now dragged about the table in every direction, by some interior power, like some living, wriggling thing, the twangs becoming sharper and more Jerky with every new pull.

It was not for the first time that Stenio heard those sounds. He had often remarked them before — indeed, ever since he had used his master's viscera as a footstool for his own ambition. But on every occasion a feeling of creeping horror had prevented him from investigating their cause, and he had tried to assure himself that the sounds were only a hallucination.

But now he stood face to face with the terrible fact whether in dream or in reality he knew not, nor did he care, since the hallucination — if hallucination it were — was far more real and vivid than any reality. He tried to speak, to take a step forward; but, as often happens in nightmares, he could neither utter a word nor move a finger . . . He felt hopelessly paralyzed.

The pulls and jerks were becoming more desperate with each moment, and at last something inside the case snapped violently. The vision of his Stradivarius, devoid of its magical strings, flashed before his eyes throwing him into a cold sweat of mute and unspeakable terror.

He made a superhuman effort to rid himself of the incubus that held him spell-bound. But as the last supplicating whisper of the invisible Presence repeated:

"Do, oh, do . . . help me to cut myself off —"

Franz sprang to the case with one bound, like an enraged tiger defending its prey, and with one frantic effort breaking the spell.

"Leave the violin alone, you old fiend from hell!" he cried, in hoarse and trembling tones.

He violently shut down the self-raising lid, and while firmly pressing his left hand on it, he seized with the right a piece of rosin from the table and drew on the leather-covered top the sign of the six-pointed star — the seal used by King Solomon to bottle up the rebellious djins inside their prisons.

A wail, like the howl of a she-wolf moaning over her dead little ones, came out of the violin-case:

"Thou art ungrateful . . . very ungrateful, my Franz!" sobbed the blubbing "spirit-voice." "But I forgive . . . for I still love thee well. Yet thou canst not shut me in . . . boy. Behold!"

And instantly a grayish mist spread over and covered case and table, and rising upward formed itself first into an indistinct shape. Then it began growing, and as it grew, Franz felt himself gradually enfolded in cold and damp coils, slimy as those of a huge snake. He gave a terrible cry and — awoke; but, strangely enough, not on his bed, but near the table, just as he had dreamed, pressing the violin case desperately with both his hands.

"It was but a dream . . . after all," he muttered, still terrified, but relieved of the load on his heaving breast.

With a tremendous effort he composed himself, and unlocked the case to inspect the violin. He found it covered with dust, but otherwise sound and in order, and he suddenly felt himself as cool and as determined as ever. Having dusted the instrument he carefully rosined the bow, tightened the strings and tuned them. He even went so far as to try upon it the first notes of the "Witches"; first cautiously and timidly, then using his bow boldly and with full force.

The sound of that loud, solitary note — defiant as the war trumpet of a conqueror, sweet and majestic as the touch of a seraph on his golden harp in the fancy of the faithful — thrilled through the very soul of Franz. It revealed to him a hitherto unsuspected potency in his bow, which ran on in strains that filled the room with the richest swell of melody, unheard by the artist until that night. Commencing in uninterrupted legato tones, his bow sang to him of sun-bright hope and beauty, of moonlit nights, when the soft and balmy stillness endowed every blade of grass and all things animate and inanimate with a voice and a song of love. For a few brief moments it was a torrent of melody, the harmony of which, "tuned to soft woe," was calculated to make mountains weep, had there been any in the room, and to soothe

. . . even th' inexorable powers of hell,

the presence of which was undeniably felt in this modest hotel room. Suddenly, the solemn legato chant, contrary to all laws of harmony, quivered, became arpeggios, and ended in shrill staccatos, like the notes of a hyena laugh. The same creeping sensation of terror, as he had before felt, came over him, and Franz threw the bow away. He had recognized the familiar laugh, and would have no more of it. Dressing, he locked the bedevilled violin securely in its case, and, taking it with him to the dining-room, determined to await quietly the hour of trial.

VI

The terrible hour of the struggle had come, and Stenio was at his post — calm, resolute, almost smiling.

The theatre was crowded to suffocation, and there was not even standing room to be got for any amount of hard cash or favouritism. The singular challenge had reached every quarter to which the post could carry it, and gold flowed freely into Paganini's unfathomable pockets, to an extent almost satisfying even to his insatiate and venal soul.

It was arranged that Paganini should begin. When he appeared upon the stage, the thick walls of the theatre shook to their foundations with the applause that greeted him. He began and ended his famous composition "The Witches" amid a storm of cheers. The shouts of public enthusiasm lasted so long that Franz began to think his turn would never come. When, at last, Paganini, amid the roaring applause of a frantic public, was allowed to retire behind the scenes, his eye fell upon Stenio, who was tuning his violin, and he felt amazed at the serene calmness, the air of assurance, of the unknown German artist.

When Franz approached the footlights, he was received with icy coldness. But for all that, he did not feel in the least disconcerted. He looked very pale, but his thin white lips wore a scornful smile as response to this dumb unwelcome. He was sure of his triumph.

At the first notes of the prelude of "The Witches" a thrill of astonishment passed over the audience. It was Paganini's touch, and — it was something more. Some — and they were the majority — thought that never, in his best moments of inspiration, had the Italian artist himself, in executing that diabolical composition of his, exhibited such an extraordinary diabolical power. Under the pressure of the long muscular fingers of Franz, the chords shivered like the palpitating intestines of a disembowelled victim under the vivisector's knife. They moaned melodiously, like a dying child. The large blue eye of the artist, fixed with a satanic expression upon the sounding-board, seemed to summon forth Orpheus himself from the infernal regions, rather than the musical notes supposed to be generated in the depths of the violin. Sounds seemed to transform themselves into objective shapes, thickly and precipitately gathering as at the evocation of a mighty magician, and to be whirling around him, like a host of fantastic, infernal figures, dancing the witches' "goat dance." In the empty depths of the shadowy background of the stage, behind the artist, a nameless phantasmagoria, produced by the concussion of unearthly vibrations, seemed to form pictures of shameless orgies, of the voluptuous hymens of a real witches' Sabbat . . . A collective hallucination took hold of the public. Panting for breath, ghastly, and trickling with the icy perspiration of an inexpressible horror, they sat spellbound, and unable to break the spell of the music by the slightest motion. They experienced all the illicit enervating delights of the paradise of Mahommed, that come into the disordered fancy of an opium-eating Mussulman, and felt at the same time the abject terror, the agony of one who struggles against an attack of delirium tremens . . . Many ladies shrieked aloud others fainted, and strong men gnashed their teeth in a state of utter helplessness . . .

Then came the finale. Thundering uninterrupted applause delayed its beginning, expanding the momentary pause to a duration of almost a quarter of an hour. The bravos were furious, almost hysterical. At last, when after a profound and last bow, Stenio, whose smile was as sardonic as it was triumphant, lifted his bow to attack the famous finale his eye fell upon Paganini, who, calmly seated in the manager's box, had been behind none in zealous applause. The small and piercing black eyes of the Genoese artist were riveted to the Stradivarius in the hands of Franz, but otherwise he seemed quite cool and unconcerned. His rival's face troubled him for one short instant, but he regained his self-possession and, lifting once more his bow, drew the first note.

Then the public enthusiasm reached its acme, and soon knew no bounds. The listeners heard and saw indeed. The witches' voices resounded in the air, and beyond all the other voices, one voice was heard —

Discordant, and unlike to human sounds;
It seem'd of dogs the bark, of wolves the howl;
The doleful screechings of the midnight owl;
The hiss of snakes, the hungry lion's roar;
The sounds of billows beating on the shore;
The groan of winds among the leafy wood,
And burst of thunder from the rending cloud, —
'Twas these, all these in one . . .

The magic bow was drawing forth its last quivering sounds — famous among prodigious musical feats — imitating the precipitate flight of the witches before bright dawn; of the unholy women saturated with the fumes of their nocturnal Saturnalia, when — a strange thing came to pass on the stage. Without the slightest transition, the notes suddenly changed. In their ærial flight of ascension and descent, their melody was unexpectedly altered in character. The sounds became confused, scattered, disconnected . . . and then — it seemed from the sounding-board of the violin — came out squeaking jarring tones, like those of a street Punch, screaming at the top of a senile voice:

"Art thou satisfied, Franz, my boy? . . . Have not I gloriously kept my promise, eh?"

The spell was broken. Though still unable to realize the whole situation, those who heard the voice and the Punchinello-like tones, were freed, as by enchantment, from the terrible charm under which they had been held. Loud roars of laughter, mocking exclamations of half-anger and half-irritation were now heard from every corner of the vast theatre. The musicians in the orchestra, with faces still blanched from weird emotion, were now seen shaking with laughter, and the whole audience rose, like one man, from their seats, unable yet to solve the enigma; they felt, nevertheless, too disgusted, too disposed to laugh to remain one moment longer in the building.

But suddenly the sea of moving heads in the stalls and the pit became once more motionless, and stood petrified as though struck by lightning. What all saw was terrible enough — the handsome though wild face of the young artist suddenly aged, and his graceful, erect figure bent down, as though under the weight of years; but this was nothing to that which some of the most sensitive clearly perceived. Franz Stenio's person was now entirely enveloped in a semi-transparent mist, cloudlike, creeping with serpentine motion, and gradually tightening round the living form, as though ready to engulf him. And there were those also who discerned in this tall and ominous pillar of smoke a clearly-defined figure, a form showing the unmistakable outlines of a grotesque and grinning, but terribly awful-looking old man, whose viscera were protruding and the ends of the intestines stretched on the violin.

Within this hazy, quivering veil, the violinist was then seen, driving his bow furiously across the human chords, with the contortions of a demoniac, as we see them represented on mediæval cathedral paintings!

An indescribable panic swept over the audience, and breaking now, for the last time, through the spell which had again bound them motionless, every living creature in the theatre made one mad rush towards the door. It was like the sudden outburst of a dam, a human torrent, roaring amid a shower of discordant notes, idiotic squeakings, prolonged and whining moans, cacophonous cries of frenzy, above

which, like the detonations of pistol shots, was heard the consecutive bursting of the four strings stretched upon the sound-board of that bewitched violin.

When the theatre was emptied of the last man of the audience, the terrified manager rushed on the stage in search of the unfortunate performer. He was found dead and already stiff, behind the footlights, twisted up into the most unnatural of postures, with the "catguts" wound curiously around his neck, and his violin shattered into a thousand fragments . . .

When it became publicly known that the unfortunate would-be rival of Nicolo Paganini had not left a cent to pay for his funeral or his hotel bill, the Genoese, his proverbial meanness notwithstanding, settled the hotel-bill and had poor Stenio buried at his own expense.

He claimed, however, in exchange, the fragments of the Stradivarius — as a memento of the strange event.

(End.)

<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/ensoulvn.htm>

Through the Ivory Gate (1905)

by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews
(d. 1936)

Breeze filtered through shuffling leafage, the June morning sunlight came in at the open window by the boy's bed, under the green shades, across the shadowy, white room, and danced a noiseless dance of youth and freshness and springtime against the wall opposite. The boy's head stirred on his pillow. He spoke a quick word from out of his dream. "The key?" he said inquiringly, and the sound of his own voice awoke him. Dark, drowsy eyes opened, and he stared half-seeing, at the picture that hung facing him. Was it the play of mischievous sunlight, was it the dream that still held his brain? He knew the picture line by line, and there was no such figure in it. It was a large photograph of Fairfield, the southern home of his mother's people, and the boy remembered it always hanging there, opposite his bed, the first sight to meet his eyes every morning since his babyhood. So he was certain there was no figure in it, more than all one so remarkable as this strapping little chap in his queer clothes, his dress of conspicuous plaid with large black velvet squares sewed on it, who stood now in front of the old manor house. Could it be only a dream? Could it be that a little ghost, wandering childlike in dim, heavenly fields, had joined the gay troop of his boyish visions and slipped in with them through the ivory gate of pleasant dreams? The boy put his fists to his eyes and rubbed them and looked again. The little fellow was still there, standing with sturdy legs wide apart as if owning the scene; he laughed as he held toward the boy a key — a small key tied with a scarlet ribbon. There was no doubt in the boy's mind that the key was for him, and out of the dim world of sleep he stretched his young arm for it; to reach it he sat up in bed. Then he was awake and knew himself alone in the peace of his own little room, and laughed shamefacedly at the reality of the vision which had followed him from dreamland into the very boundaries of consciousness, which held him even now with gentle tenacity, which drew him back through the day, from his studies, from his play, into the strong current of its fascination.

The first time Philip Beckwith had this dream he was only twelve years old, and, withheld by the deep reserve of childhood, he told not even his mother about it, though he lived in its atmosphere all day and remembered it vividly days longer. A year after it came again; and again it was a June morning, and as his eyes opened the little boy came once more out of the picture toward him, laughing and holding out the key on its scarlet string. The dream was a pleasant one, and Philip welcomed it eagerly from his sleep as a friend. There seemed something sweet and familiar in the child's presence beyond the one memory of him, as again the boy, with eyes half-open to everyday life, saw him standing, small but masterful, in the garden of that old house where the Fairfields had lived for more than a century. Half-consciously he tried to prolong the vision, tried not to wake entirely for fear of losing it; but the picture faded surely from the curtain of his mind as the tangible world painted there its heavier outlines. It was as if a happy little spirit had tried to follow him, for love of him, from a country lying close, yet separated; it was as if the common childhood of the two made it almost possible for them to meet; as if a message that might not be spoken, were yet almost delivered.

The third time the dream came it was a December morning of the year when Philip was fifteen, and falling snow made wavering light and shadow on the wall where hung the picture. This time, with eyes wide open, yet with the possession of the dream strongly on him, he lay subconsciously alert and gazed, as in the odd unmistakable dress that Philip knew now in detail, the bright-faced child swung toward him, always from the garden of that old place, always trying with loving, merry efforts to reach Philip

from out of it — always holding to him the red ribboned key. Like a wary hunter the big boy lay — knowing it unreal, yet living it keenly — and watched his chance. As the little figure glided close to him, he put out his hand suddenly, swiftly for the key — he was awake. As always, the dream was gone; the little ghost was baffled again; the two worlds might not meet.

That day Mrs. Beckwith, puffing in order an old mahogany secretary, showed him a drawer full of photographs, daguerreotypes. The boy and his gay young mother were the best of friends, for, only nineteen when he was born, she had never let the distance widen between them; had held the freshness of her youth sacred against the time when he should share it. Year by year, living in his enthusiasms, drawing him to hers, she had grown young in his childhood, which year by year came closer to her maturity. Until now there was between the tall, athletic lad and the still young and attractive woman, an equal friendship, a common youth, which gave charm and elasticity to the natural tie between them. Yet even to this comrade-mother the boy had not told his dream, for the difficulty of putting into words the atmosphere, the compelling power of it. So that when she opened one of the old-fashioned black cases which held the early sun-pictures, and showed him the portrait within, he startled her by a sudden exclamation. From the frame of red velvet and tarnished gilt there laughed up at him the little boy of his dream. There was no mistaking him, and if there were doubt about the face, there was the peculiar dress — the black and white plaid with large squares of black velvet sewed here and there as decoration. Philip stared in astonishment at the sturdy figure; the childish face with its wide forehead and level, strong brows; its dark eyes straight-gazing and smiling.

"Mother — who is he? Who is he?" he demanded.

"Why, my lamb, don't you know? It's your little uncle Philip — my brother, for whom you were named — Philip Fairfield the sixth. There was always a Philip Fairfield at Fairfield since 1790. This one was the last, poor baby! And he died when he was five. Unless you go back there some day — that's my hope, but it's not likely to come true. You are a Yankee, except for the big half of you that's me. That's southern, every inch." She laughed and kissed his fresh cheek impulsively. "But what made you so excited over this picture, Phil?"

Philip gazed down, serious, a little embarrassed, at the open case in his hand. "Mother," he said after a moment, "you'll laugh at me, but I've seen this chap in a dream three times now."

"Oh!" She did laugh at him. "Oh, Philip! What have you been eating for dinner, I'd like to know? I can't have you seeing visions of your ancestors at fifteen — it's unhealthy."

The boy, reddening, insisted. "But, Mother, really, don't you think it was queer? I saw him as plainly as I do now — and I've never seen this picture before."

"Oh, yes, you have — you must have seen it," his mother threw back lightly. "You've forgotten, but the image of it was tucked away in some dark corner of your mind, and when you were asleep it stole out and played tricks on you. That's the way forgotten ideas do: they get even with you in dreams for having forgotten them."

"Mother, only listen ——" But Mrs. Beckwith, her eyes lighting with a swift turn of thought, interrupted him — laid her finger on his lips.

"No — you listen, boy dear — quick, before I forget it! I've never told you about this, and it's very interesting."

And the youngster, used to these willful ways-of his sistermother, laughed and put his fair head against her shoulder and listened.

"It's quite a romance," she began, "only there isn't any end to it; it's all unfinished and disappointing. It's about this little Philip here, whose name you have — my brother. He died when he was five, as I said, but even then he had a bit of dramatic history in his life. He was born just before wartime in 1859, and he was a beautiful and wonderful baby; I can remember all about it, for I was six years older. He was incarnate sunshine, the happiest child that ever lived, but far too quick and clever for his years. The servants used to ask him, 'Who is you, Marse Philip, sah?' to hear him answer, before he could speak it plainly, 'I'm Philip Fairfield of Fairfield'; he seemed to realize that, and his responsibility to them and to the place, as soon as he could breathe. He wouldn't have a darky scolded in his presence, and every morning my father put him in front of him in the saddle, and they rode together about the plantation. My father adored him, and little Philip's sunshiny way of taking possession of the slaves and the property pleased him more deeply, I think, than anything in his life. But the war came before this time, when the child was about a year old, and my father went off, of course, as every southern man went who could walk, and for a year we did not see him. Then he was badly wounded at the battle of Malvern Hill; and came home to get well. However, it was more serious than he knew, and he did not get well. Twice he went off again to join our army, and each time he was sent back within a month, too ill to be of any use. He chafed constantly, of course, because he must stay at home and farm, when his whole soul ached to be fighting for his flag; but finally in December 1863, he thought he was well enough at last for service. He was to join General John Morgan, who had just made his wonderful escape from prison at Columbus, and it was planned that my mother should take lithe Philip and me to England to live there till the war was over and we could all be together at Fairfield again. With that in view my father drew all of his ready money — it was ten thousand dollars in gold — from the banks in Lexington, for my mother's use in the years they might be separated. When suddenly, the day before he was to have gone, the old wound broke out again, and he was helplessly ill in bed at the hour when he should have been on his horse riding toward Tennessee. We were fifteen miles out from Lexington, yet it might be rumored that father had drawn a large sum of money, and, of course, he was well known as a Southern officer. Because of the Northern soldiers, who held the city, he feared very much to have the money in the house, yet he hoped still to join Morgan a lithe later, and then it would be needed as he had planned. Christmas morning my father was so much better that my mother went to church, taking me, and leaving lithe Philip, then four years old, to amuse him. What happened that morning was the point of all this rambling; so now listen hard, my precious thing."

The boy, sitting erect now, caught his mother's hand silently, and his eyes stared into hers as he drank in every word:

"Mammy, who was, of course, little Philip's nurse, told my mother afterward that she was sent away before my father and the boy went into the garden, but she saw them go and saw that my father had a tin box — a box about twelve inches long, which seemed very heavy — in his arms, and on his finger swung a long red ribbon with a little key strung on it. Mother knew it as the key of the box, and she had tied the ribbon on it herself.

"It was a bright, crisp Christmas day, pleasant in the garden — the box hedges were green and fragrant, aromatic in the sunshine. You don't even know the smell of box in sunshine, you poor child! But I

remember that day, for I was ten years old, a right big girl, and it was a beautiful morning for an invalid to take the air. Mammy said she was proud to see how her 'handsome boy' kept step with his father, and she watched the two until they got away down by the rose garden, and then she couldn't see little Philip behind the three-foot hedge, so she turned away. But somewhere in that big garden, or under the trees beside it, my father buried the box that held the money — ten thousand dollars. It shows how he trusted that baby, that he took him with him, and you'll see how his trust was only too well justified. For that evening, Christmas night, very suddenly my father died — before he had time to tell my mother where he had hidden the box. He tried; when consciousness came a few minutes before the end he gasped out, 'I buried the money' — and then he choked. Once again he whispered just two words: 'Philip knows.' And my mother said, 'Yes, dearest — Philip and I will find it — don't worry, dearest,' and that quieted him. She told me about it so many times.

"After the funeral she took little Philip and explained to him as well as she could that he must tell Mother where he and Father had put the box, and — this is the point of it all, Philip — he wouldn't tell. She went over and over it all, again and again, but it was no use. He had given his word to my father never to tell, and he was too much of a baby to understand how death had dissolved that promise. My mother tried every way, of course, explanations and reasoning first, then pleading, and finally severity; she even punished the poor lithe martyr, for it was awfully important to us all. But the four-year-old baby was absolutely incorruptible. He cried bitterly and sobbed out:

"'Farver said I mustn't never tell anybody — never! Farver said Philip Fairfield of Fairfield mustn't never bweak his words,' and that was all.

"Nothing could induce him to give the least hint. Of course there was great search for it, but it was well hidden and it was never found. Finally, Mother took her obdurate son and me and came to New York with us, and we lived on the little income which she had of her own. Her hope was that as soon as Philip was old enough she could make him understand, and go back with him and get that large sum lying underground — lying there yet, perhaps. But in less than a year the little boy was dead and the secret was gone with him."

Philip Beckwith's eyes were intense and wide. The Fairfield eyes, brown and brilliant, their young fire was concentrated on his mother's face.

"Do you mean that money is buried down there, yet, mother?" he asked solemnly.

Mrs. Beckwith caught at the big fellow's sleeve with slim fingers. "Don't go today, Phil — wait till after lunch, anyway!"

"Please don't make fun, Mother — I want to know about it. Think of it lying there in the ground!"

"Greedy boy! We don't need money now, Phil. And the old place will be yours when I am dead ——" The lad's arm went about his mother's shoulders. "Oh, but I'm not going to die for ages! Not till I'm a toothless old person with side curls, hobbling along on a stick. Like this!" — she sprang to her feet and the boy laughed a great peal at the haglike effect as his young mother threw herself into the part. She dropped on the divan again at his side.

"What I meant to tell you was that your father thinks it very unlikely that the money is there yet, and almost impossible that we could find it in any case. But some day when the place is yours you can have it

put through a sieve if you choose. I wish I could think you would ever live there, Phil; but I can't imagine any chance by which you should. I should hate to have you sell it — it has belonged to a Philip Fairfield so many years."

A week later the boy left his childhood by the side of his mother's grave. His history for the next seven years may go in a few lines. School days, vacations, the four years at college, outwardly the commonplace of an even and prosperous development, inwardly the infinite variety of experience by which each soul is a person; the result of the two so wholesome a product of young manhood that no one realized under the frank and open manner a deep reticence, an intensity, a sensitiveness to impressions, a tendency toward mysticism which made the fiber of his being as delicate as it was strong.

Suddenly, in a turn of the wheel, all the externals of his life changed. His rich father died penniless and he found himself on his own hands, and within a month the boy who had owned five polo ponies was a hard-working reporter on a great daily. The same quick-wittedness and energy which had made him a good polo player made him a good reporter. Promotion came fast and, as those who are busiest have the most time to spare, he fell to writing stories. When the editor of a large magazine took one, Philip first lost respect for that dignified person, then felt ashamed to have imposed on him, then rejoiced utterly over the check. After that editors fell into the habit; the people he ran against knew about his books; the checks grew better reading all the time; a point came where it was more profitable to stay at home and imagine events than to go out and report them. He had been too busy as the days marched to generalize; but suddenly he knew that he was a successful writer, that if he kept his head and worked, a future was before him. So he soberly put his own English by the side of that of a master or two from his bookshelves, to keep his perspective clear, and then he worked harder. And it came to be five years after his father's death.

At the end of those years three things happened at once. The young man suddenly was very tired and knew that he needed the vacation he had gone without; a check came in large enough to make a vacation easy; and he had his old dream. His fagged brain had found it but another worry to decide where he should go to rest, but the dream settled the vexed question offhand — he would go to Kentucky. The very thought of it brought rest to him, for like a memory of childhood, like a bit of his own soul, he knew the country — the "God's Country" of its people — which he had never seen. He caught his breath as he thought of warm, sweet air that held no hurry or nerve strain; of lingering sunny days whose hours are longer than in other places; of the soft speech, the serene and kindly ways of the people; of the royal welcome waiting for him as for everyone, heartfelt and heart-warming; he knew it all from a daughter of Kentucky — his mother. It was May now, and he remembered she had told him that the land was filled with roses at the end of May — he would go then. He owned the old place, Fairfield, and he had never seen it. Perhaps it had fallen to pieces; perhaps his mother had painted it in colors too bright; but it was his, the bit of the earth that belonged to him. The Anglo-Saxon joy of landowning stirred for the first time within him — he would go to his own place. Buoyant with the new thought, he sat down and wrote a letter. A cousin of the family, of a younger branch, a certain John Fairfield, lived yet upon the land. Not in the great house, for that had been closed many years, but in a small house almost as old, called Westerly. Philip had corresponded with him once or twice about affairs of the estate, and each letter of the older man's had brought a simple and urgent invitation to come South and visit him. So, pleased as a child with the plan, he wrote that he was coming on a certain Thursday, late in May. The letter sent, he went about in a dream of the South, and when its answer, delighted and hospitable, came simultaneously with one of those bleak and windy turns of weather which make New York, even in May, a marvelously fitting place to leave, he could not wait. Almost a week ahead of his time he packed his bag and took the Southwestern Limited, and on a bright Sunday

morning he awoke in the old Phoenix Hotel in Lexington. He had arrived too late the night before to make the fifteen miles to Fairfield, but he had looked over the horses in the livery stable and chosen the one he wanted, for he meant to go on horseback, as a southern gentleman should, to his domain. That he meant to go alone, that no one, not even John Fairfield, knew of his coming, was not the least of his satisfactions, for the sight of the place of his forefathers, so long neglected, was becoming suddenly a sacred thing to him. The old house and its young owner should meet each other like sweethearts, with no eyes to watch their greeting, their slow and sweet acquainting; with no living voices to drown the sound of the ghostly voices that must greet his homecoming from those walls — voices of his people who had lived there, voices gone long since into eternal silence.

A little crowd of loungers stared with frank admiration at the young fellow who came out smiling from the door of the Phoenix Hotel, big and handsome in his riding clothes, his eyes taking in the details of girths and bits and straps with the keenness of a horseman.

Philip laughed as he swung into the saddle and looked down at the friendly faces, most of them black faces, below. "Goodbye," he said. "Wish me good luck, won't you?" and a willing chorus of "Good luck, boss," came flying after him as the horse's hoofs clattered down the street.

Through the bright drowsiness of the little city he rode in the early Sunday morning, and his heart sang for joy to feel himself again across a horse, and for the love of the place that warmed him already. The sun shone hotly, but he liked it; he felt his whole being slipping into place, fitting to its environment; surely, in spite of birth and breeding, he was southern born and bred, for this felt like home more than any home he had known!

As he drew away from the city, every little while, through stately woodlands, a dignified sturdy mansion peeped down its long vista of trees at the passing cavalier, and, enchanted with its beautiful setting, with its air of proud unconsciousness, he hoped each time that Fairfield would look like that. If he might live here — and go to New York, to be sure, two or three times a year to keep the edge of his brain sharpened — but if he might live his life as these people lived, in this unhurried atmosphere, in this perfect climate, with the best things in his reach for everyday use; with horses and dogs, with out-of-doors and a great, lovely country to breathe in; with — he smiled vaguely — with sometime perhaps a wife who loved it as he did — he would ask from earth no better life than that. He could write, he felt certain, better and larger things in such surroundings.

But he pulled himself up sharply as he thought how idle a daydream it was. As a fact, he was a struggling young author, he had come South for two weeks' vacation, and on the first morning he was planning to live here — he must be lightheaded. With a touch of his heel and a word and a quick pull on the curb, his good horse broke into a canter, and then, under the loosened rein, into a rousing gallop, and Philip went dashing down the country road, past the soft, rolling landscape, and under cool caves of foliage, vivid with emerald greens of May, thoughts and dreams all dissolved in exhilaration of the glorious movement, the nearest thing to flying that the wingless animal, man, may achieve.

He opened his coat as the blood rushed faster through him, and a paper fluttered from his pocket. He caught it, and as he pulled the horse to a trot, he saw that it was his cousin's letter. So, walking now along the brown shadows and golden sunlight of the long white pike, he fell to wondering about the family he was going to visit. He opened the folded letter and read:

"My dear Cousin," it said — the kinship was the first thought in John Fairfield's mind — "I received your welcome letter on the 14th. I am delighted that you are coming at last to Kentucky, and I consider that it is high time you paid Fairfield, which has been the cradle of your stock for many generations, the compliment of looking at it. We closed our house in Lexington three weeks ago, and are settled out here now for the summer, and find it lovelier than ever. My family consists only of myself and Shelby, my one child, who is now twenty-two years of age. We are both ready to give you an old-time Kentucky welcome, and Westerly is ready to receive you at any moment you wish to come."

The rest was merely arrangements for meeting the traveler, all of which were done away with by his earlier arrival.

"A prim old party, with an exalted idea of the family," commented Philip mentally. "Well-to-do, apparently, or he wouldn't be having a winter house in the city. I wonder what the boy Shelby is like. At twenty-two he should be doing something more profitable than spending an entire summer out here, I should say."

The questions faded into the general content of his mind at the glimpse of another stately old pillared homestead, white and deep down its avenue of locusts. At length he stopped his horse to wait for a ragged Negro trudging cheerfully down the road.

"Do you know a place around here called Fairfield?" he asked.

"Yessah. I does that, sah. It's that ar' place right hyeh, sah, by yo' hoss. That ar's Fahfiel'. Shall I open the gate fo' you, boss?" and Philip turned to see a hingeless ruin of boards held together by the persuasion of rusty wire.

"The home of my fathers looks down in the mouth," he reflected aloud.

The old Negro's eyes, gleaming from under shaggy sheds of eyebrows, watched him, and he caught the words.

"Is you a Fahfiel', boss?" he asked eagerly. "Is you my young marse?" He jumped at the conclusion promptly. "You favors de fam'ly mightily, sah. I heerd you was comin'"; the rag of a hat went off and he bowed low. "Hit's cert'nly good news fo' Fahfiel', Marse Philip, hit's mighty good news fo' us niggers, sah. I'se btlonged to the Fahfiel' fam'ly a hundred years, Marse — me and my folks, and I wishes yo' a welcome home, sah — welcome home, Marse Philip."

Philip bent with a quick movement from his horse and gripped the twisted old black hand, speechless. This humble welcome on the highway caught at his heart deep down, and the appeal of the colored people to southerners, who know them, the thrilling appeal of a gentle, loyal race, doomed to live forever behind a veil and hopeless without bitterness, stirred for the first time his manhood. It touched him to be taken for granted as the child of his people; it pleased him that he should be "Marse Philip" as a matter of course, because there had always been a Marse Philip at the place. It was bred deeper in the bone of him than he knew, to understand the soul of the black man; the stuff he was made of had been southern two hundred years.

The old man went off down the white limestone road singing to himself, and Philip rode slowly under the locusts and beeches up the long drive, grass-grown and lost in places, that wound through the

woodland three-quarters of a mile to his house. And as he moved through the park, through sunlight and shadow of these great trees that were his, he felt like a knight of King Arthur, like some young knight long exiled, at last coming to his own. He longed with an unreasonable seizure of desire to come here to live, to take care of it, beautify it, fill it with life and prosperity as it had once been filled, surround it with cheerful faces of colored people whom he might make happy and comfortable. If only he had money to pay off the mortgage, to put the place once in order, it would be the ideal setting for the life that seemed marked out for him — the life of a writer.

The horse turned a corner and broke into a canter up the slope, and as the shoulder of the hill fell away there stood before him the picture of his childhood come to life, smiling drowsily in the morning sunlight with shuttered windows that were its sleeping eyes — the great white house of Fairfield. Its high pillars reached to the roof; its big wings stretched away at either side; the flicker of the shadow of the leaves played over it tenderly and hid broken bits of woodwork, patches of paint cracked away, windowpanes gone here and there. It stood as if too proud to apologize or to look sad for such small matters, as serene, as stately as in its prime. And its master, looking at it for the first time, loved it.

He rode around to the side and tied his mount to an old horse-rack, and then walked up the wide front steps as if each lift were an event. He turned the handle of the big door without much hope that it would yield, but it opened willingly, and he stood inside. A broom lay in a corner, windows were open — his cousin had been making ready for him. There was the huge mahogany sofa, horsehair-covered, in the window under the stairs, where his mother had read *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*. Philip stepped softly across the wide hall and laid his head where must have rested the brown hair of the little girl who had come to be, first all of his life, and then its dearest memory. Half an hour he spent in the old house, and its walls echoed to his footsteps as if in ready homage, and each empty room whose door he opened met him with a sweet half-familiarity. The whole place was filled with the presence of the child who had loved it and left it, and for whom this tall man, her child, longed now as if for a little sister who should be here, and whom he missed. With her memory came the thought of the five-year-old uncle who had made history for the family so disastrously. He must see the garden where that other Philip had gone with his father to hide the money on the fated Christmas morning. He closed the house door behind him carefully, as if he would not disturb a little girl reading in the window, a little boy sleeping perhaps in the nursery above. Then he walked down the broad sweep of the driveway, the gravel crunching under the grass, and across what had been a bit of velvet lawn, and stood for a moment with his hand on a broken vase, weed-filled, which capped the stone post of a gateway.

All the garden was misty with memories. Where a tall golden flower nodded alone from out of the tangled thicket of an old flowerbed a bright-haired child might have laughed with just that air of starred, gay naughtiness, from the forbidden center of the blossoms. In the molded tan-bark of the path was a vague print, like the ghost of a footprint that had passed down the way a lifetime ago. The box, half-dead, half-sprouted into high unkept growth, still stood stiffly against the riotous overflow of weeds as if it yet held loyally to its business of guarding the borders. Philip shifted his gaze slowly, lingering over the dim contours, the shadowy shape of what the garden had been. Suddenly his eyes opened wide. How was this? There was a hedge as neat, as clipped, as any of Southampton in midseason, and over it a glory of roses, red and white and pink and yellow, waved gay banners to him in trim luxuriance. He swung toward them, and the breeze brought him for the first time in his life the fragrance of box in sunshine.

Three feet tall, shaven and thick and shining, the old hedge stood, and the garnered sweetness of a hundred years' slow growth breathed delicately from it toward the great-great-grandson of the man who planted it. A box hedge takes as long in the making as a gentleman, and when they are done the

two are much of a sort. No plant in all the garden has so subtle an air of breeding, so gentle a reserve, yet so gracious a message of sweetness for all of the world who will stop to learn it. It keeps a firm dignity under the stress of tempest when lighter growths are tossed and torn; it shines bright through the snow; it has a well-bred willingness to be background, with the well-bred gift of presence, whether as background or foreground. The soul of the box tree is an aristocrat, and the sap that runs through it is the blue blood of vegetation.

Saluting him bravely in the hot sunshine with its myriad shining sword points, the old hedge sent out to Philip on the May breeze its ancient welcome of aromatic fragrance, and the tall roses crowded gaily to look over its edge at the new master. Slowly, a little dazed at this oasis of shining order in the neglected garden, he walked to the opening and stepped inside the hedge. The rose garden! The famous rose garden of Fairfield, and as his mother had described it, in full splendor of cared-for, orderly bloom. Across the paths he stepped swiftly till he stood amid the roses, giant bushes of Jacqueminot and Marechal Niel; of pink and white and red and yellow blooms in thick array. The glory of them intoxicated him. That he should own all of this beauty seemed too good to be true, and instantly he wanted to taste his ownership. The thought came to him that he would enter into his heritage with strong hands here in the rose garden; he caught a deep-red Jacqueminot almost roughly by its gorgeous head and broke off the stem. He would gather a bunch, a huge, unreasonable bunch of his own flowers. Hungrily he broke one after another; his shoulders bent over them, he was deep in the bushes.

"I reckon I shall have to ask you not to pick any more of those roses," a voice said.

Philip threw up his head as if he had been shot; he turned sharply with a great thrill, for he thought his mother spoke to him. Perhaps it was only the southern inflection so long unheard, perhaps the sunlight that shone in his eyes dazzled him, but, as he stared, the white figure before him seemed to him to look exactly as his mother had looked long ago. Stumbling over his words, he caught at the first that came.

"I — I think it's all right," he said.

The girl smiled frankly, yet with a dignity in her puzzled air. "I'm afraid I shall have to be right decided," she said. "These roses are private property and I mustn't let you have them."

"Oh!" Philip dropped the great bunch of gorgeous color guiltily by his side, but still held tightly the prickly mass of stems, knowing his right, yet half-wondering if he could have made a mistake. He stammered:

"I thought — to whom do they belong?"

"They belong to my cousin, Mr. Philip Fairfield Beckwith" — the sound of his own name was pleasant as the falling voice strayed through it. "He is coming home in a few days, so I want them to look their prettiest for him — for his first sight of them. I take care of this rose garden," she said, and laid a motherly hand on the nearest flower. Then she smiled. "It doesn't seem right hospitable to stop you, but if you will come over to Westerly, to our house, Father will be glad to see you, and I will certainly give you all the flowers you want." The sweet and masterful apparition looked with a gracious certainty of obedience straight into Philip's bewildered eyes.

"The boy Shelby!" Many a time in the months after, Philip Beckwith smiled to himself reminiscently, tenderly, as he thought of "the boy Shelby" whom he had read into John Fairfield's letter; "the boy

Shelby" who was twenty-two years old and the only child; "the boy Shelby" whom he had blamed with such easy severity for idling at Fairfield; "the boy Shelby" who was no boy at all, but this white flower of girlhood, called — after the quaint and reasonable southern way — as a boy is called, by the surname of her mother's people.

Toward Westerly, out of the garden of the old time, out of the dimness of a forgotten past, the two took their radiant youth and the brightness of today. But a breeze blew across the tangle of weeds and flowers as they wandered away, and whispered a hope, perhaps a promise; for as it touched them each tall stalk nodded gaily and the box hedges rustled delicately an answering undertone. And just at the edge of the woodland, before they were out of sight, the girl turned and threw a kiss back to the roses and the box.

"I always do that," she said. "I love them so!"

Two weeks later a great train rolled into the Grand Central Station of New York at half-past six at night, and from it stepped a monstrosity — a young man without a heart. He had left all of it, more than he had thought he owned, in Kentucky. But he had brought back with him a store of memories which gave him more joy than ever the heart had done, to his best knowledge, in all the years. They were memories of long and sunshiny days; of afternoons spent in the saddle, rushing through grassy lanes where trumpet flowers flamed over gray farm fences, or trotting slowly down white roads; of whole mornings only an hour long, passed in the enchanted stillness of an old garden; of gay, desultory searches through its length and breadth, and in the park that held it, for buried treasure; of moonlit nights; of roses and June and Kentucky — and always, through all the memories, the presence that made them what they were, that of a girl he loved.

No word of love had been spoken, but the two weeks had made over his life; and he went back to his work with a definite object, a hope stronger than ambition, and, set to it as music to words, came insistently another hope, a dream that he did not let himself dwell on — a longing to make enough money to pay off the mortgage and put Fairfield in order, and live and work there all his life — with Shelby. That was where the thrill of the thought came in, but the place was very dear to him in itself.

The months went, and the point of living now was the mail from the South, and the feast days were the days that brought letters from Fairfield. He had promised to go back for a week at Christmas, and he worked and hoarded all the months between with a thought which he did not formulate, but which ruled his down-sitting and his up-rising, the thought that if he did well and his bank account grew enough to justify it he might, when he saw her at Christmas, tell her what he hoped; ask her — he finished the thought with a jump of his heart. He never worked harder or better, and each check that came in meant a step toward the promised land; and each seemed for the joy that was in it to quicken his pace, to lengthen his stride, to strengthen his touch. Early in November he found one night when he came to his rooms two letters waiting for him with the welcome Kentucky postmark. They were in John Fairfield's handwriting and in his daughter's, and "place aux dames" ruled rather than respect to age, for he opened Shelby's first. His eyes smiling, he read it.

"I am knitting you a diamond necklace for Christmas," she wrote. "Will you like that? Or be sure to write me if you'd rather have me hunt in the garden and dig you up a box of money. I'll tell you — there ought to be luck in the day, for it was hidden on Christmas and it should be found on Christmas; so on Christmas morning we'll have another look, and if you find it I'll catch you 'Christmas gif' as the darkies do, and you'll have to give it to me, and if I find it I'll give it to you; so that's fair, isn't it? Anyway —151;"

and Philip's eyes jumped from line to line, devouring the clear, running writing. "So bring a little present with you, please — just a tiny something for me," she ended, "for I'm certainly going to catch you 'Christmas gif'."

Philip folded the letter back into its envelope and put it in his pocket, and his heart felt warmer for the scrap of paper over it. Then he cut John Fairfield's open dreamily, his mind still on the words he had read, on the threat — "I'm going to catch you 'Christmas gif'." What was there good enough to give her? Himself, he thought humbly, very far from good enough for the girl, the lily of the world. With a sigh that was not sad he dismissed the question and began to read the other letter. He stood reading it by the fading light from the window, his hat thrown by him on a chair, his overcoat still on, and, as he read, the smile died from his face. With drawn brows he read on to the end, and then the letter dropped from his fingers to the floor and he did not notice; his eyes stared widely at the high building across the street, the endless rows of windows, the lights flashing into them here and there. But he saw none of it. He saw a stretch of quiet woodland, an old house with great white pillars, a silent, neglected garden, with box hedges sweet and ragged, all waiting for him to come and take care of them — the honor of his fathers, the home he had meant, had expected — he knew it now — would be some day his own, the home he had lost! John Fairfield's letter was to tell him that the mortgage on the place, running now so many years, was suddenly to be foreclosed; that, property not being worth much in the neighborhood, no one would take it up; that on January 2nd Fairfield, the house and land, were to be sold at auction. It was a hard blow to Philip Beckwith, With his hands in his overcoat pockets he began to walk up and down the room, trying to plan, to see if by any chance he might save this place he loved. It would mean eight thousand dollars to pay the mortgage. One or two thousand more would put the estate in order, but that might wait if he could only tide over this danger, save the house and land. An hour he walked so, forgetting dinner, forgetting the heavy coat which he still wore, and then he gave it up. With all he had saved — and it was a fair and promising beginning — he could not much more than half-pay the mortgage, and there was no way, which he would consider, by which he could get the money. Fairfield would have to go, and he set his teeth and clenched his fists as he thought how much he wanted to keep it. A year ago it had meant nothing to him, a year from now if things went his way he could have paid the mortgage. That it should happen just this year — just now! He could not go down at Christmas; it would break his heart to see the place again as his own when it was just slipping from his grasp. He would wait until it was all over, and go, perhaps, in the spring. The great hope of his life was still his own, but Fairfield had been the setting of that hope; he must readjust his world before he saw Shelby again. So he wrote them that he would not come at present, and then tried to dull the ache of his loss with hard work.

But three days before Christmas, out of the unknown forces beyond his reasoning swept a wave of desire to go South, which took him off his feet. Trained to trust his brain and deny his impulse as he was, yet there was a vein of sentiment, almost of superstition, in him which the thought of the old place pricked sharply to life. This longing was something beyond him — he must go — and he had thrown his decisions to the winds and was feverish until he could get away.

As before, he rode out from the Phoenix Hotel, and at ten o'clock in the morning he turned into Fairfield. It was a still, bright Christmas morning, crisp and cool, and the air like wine. The house stood bravely in the sunlight, but the branches above it were bare and no softening leafage hid the marks of time; it looked old and sad and deserted today, and its master gazed at it with a pang in his heart. It was his, and he could not save it. He turned away and walked slowly to the garden, and stood a moment as he had stood last May, with his hand on the stone gateway. It was very silent and lonely here, in the

hush of winter; nothing stirred; even the shadows of the interlaced branches above lay almost motionless across the walks.

Something moved to his left, down the pathway — he turned to look. Had his heart stopped, that he felt this strange, cold feeling in his breast? Were his eyes — could he be seeing? Was this insanity? Fifty feet down the path, half in the weaving shadows, half in clear sunlight, stood the little boy of his lifelong vision, in the dress with the black velvet squares, his little uncle, dead forty years ago. As he gazed, his breath stopping, the child smiled and held up to him, as of old, a key on a scarlet string, and turned and flitted as if a flower had taken wing, away between the box hedges. Philip, his feet moving as if without his will, followed him. Again the baby face turned its smiling dark eyes toward him, and Philip knew that the child was calling him, though there was no sound; and again without volition of his own his feet took him where it led. He felt his breath coming difficulty, and suddenly a gasp shook him — there was no footprint on the unfrozen earth where the vision had passed. Yet there before him, moving through the deep sunlit silence of the garden, was the familiar, sturdy little form in its Old-World dress. Philip's eyes were open; he was awake, walking; he saw it. Across the neglected tangle it glided, and into the trim order of Shelby's rose garden; in the opening between the box walls it wheeled again, and the sun shone clear on the bronze hair and fresh face, and the scarlet string flashed and the key glinted at the end of it. Philip's fascinated eyes saw all of that. Then the apparition slipped into the shadow of the beech trees and Philip quickened his step breathlessly, for it seemed that life and death hung on the sight. In and out through the trees it moved; once more the face turned toward him; he caught the quick brightness of a smile. The little chap had disappeared behind the broad tree trunk, and Philip, catching his breath, hurried to see him appear again. He was gone. The little spirit that had strayed from over the border of a world — who can say how far, how near? — unafraid in this earth-corner once its home, had slipped away into eternity through the white gate of ghosts and dreams.

Philip's heart was pumping painfully as he came, dazed and staring, to the place where the apparition had vanished. It was a giant-beech tree, all of two hundred and fifty years old, and around its base ran a broken wooden bench, where pretty girls of Fairfield had listened to their sweethearts, where children destined to be generals and judges had played with their black mummies, where gray-haired judges and generals had come back to think over the fights that were fought out. There were letters carved into the strong bark, the branches swung down whisperingly, the green tent of the forest seemed filled with the memory of those who had camped there and gone on. Philip's feet stumbled over the roots as he circled the veteran; he peered this way and that, but the woodland was hushed and empty; the birds whistled above, the grasses rustled below, unconscious, casual, as if they knew nothing of a child-soul that had wandered back on Christmas day with a Christmas message, perhaps, of goodwill to its own.

As he stood on the farther side of the tree where the little ghost had faded from him, at his feet lay, open and conspicuous, a fresh, deep hole. He looked down absent-mindedly. Some animal — a dog, a rabbit — had scratched far into the earth. A bar of sunlight struck a golden arm through the branches above, and as he gazed at the upturned, brown dirt the rays that were its fingers reached into the hollow and touched a square corner, a rusty edge of tin. In a second the young fellow was down on his knees digging as if for his life, and in less than five minutes he had loosened the earth which had guarded it so many years, and staggering with it to his feet had lifted to the bench a heavy tin box. In its lock was the key, and dangling from it a long bit of no-colored silk, that yet, as he untwisted it, showed a scarlet thread in the crease. He opened the box with the little key; it turned scrapingly, and the ribbon crumbled in his fingers, its long duty done. Then, as he tilted the heavy weight, the double eagles, packed closely, slipped against each other with a soft clink of sliding metal. The young man stared at the mass of gold pieces as if he could not trust his eyesight; he half thought even then that he dreamed it.

With a quick memory of the mortgage he began to count. It was all there — ten thousand dollars in gold! He lifted his head and gazed at the quiet woodland, the open shadowwork of the bare branches, the fields beyond lying in the calm sunlit rest of a southern winter. Then he put his hand deep into the gold pieces, and drew a long breath. It was impossible to believe, but it was true. The lost treasure was found. It meant to him Shelby and home; as he realized what it meant, his heart felt as if it would break with the joy of it. He would give her this for his Christmas gift, this legacy of his people and hers, and then he would give her himself. It was all easy now — life seemed not to hold a difficulty. And the two would keep tenderly, always, the thought of a child who had loved his home and his people and who had tried so hard, so long, to bring them together. He knew the dream-child would not visit him again — the little ghost was laid that had followed him all his life. From over the border whence it had come with so many loving efforts it would never come again. Slowly, with the heavy weight in his arms, with the eyes of a man who had seen a solemn thing, he walked back to the garden sleeping in the sunshine, and the box hedges met him with a wave of fragrance, the sweetness of a century ago; and as he passed through their shining door, looking beyond, he saw Shelby. The girl's figure stood by the stone column of the garden entrance. The light shone on her bare head, and she had stopped, surprised, as she saw him. Philip lifted his hat high, and his pace quickened with his heartthrob as he looked at her and thought of the little ghostly hands that had brought theirs together; and as he looked the smile that meant his welcome and his happiness broke over her face, and with the sound of her voice all the shades of this world and the next dissolved in light.

"'Christmas gif', ' Marse Philip!" called Shelby.

(End.)
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Louquier's Third Act

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LOUQUIER had been crossed in love. The old phrase covers his case. The girl does not matter, the circumstances do not matter; nothing matters except that Louquier had fallen in love, and that the lady had not reciprocated--not at least effectively, to the point of marrying Louquier. She does not come into the story in her own person; only as a cause. She affected Louquier; and his state is responsible for what happened. Of course Louquier's own temperament counts largely; other men might have been affected differently. Louquier, crossed in love, was a very special human formula.

Louquier was cursed with a small patrimony that made it entirely unnecessary for him to work, so long as his tastes remained simple. The lady apart, he had no ambitions; he was, I regret to say the sort of obsolescent fool who thinks that it is more lovely to be than to do, and that your most serious task in life is to adorn and beautify your personality. If he had been up to it, he would have been a first-class dilettante. He would have loved rejecting (like Walter Pater) exquisite cinerarias of the wrong color, or leaving a concert-hall because Beethoven was too vulgarly romantic. But he could never have done either, for the simple reason that his good, garish taste would never have given him the tip. His way did not lie through Art. He was too easily pleased. He loved Beauty even when it was merely pretty. No, his way did not lie through Art.

Louquier knew something of all this and wisely did not try for instincts that he did not possess. But he had his own way of being a highbrow. He could first isolate and then appreciate an emotion or a sensation--either in himself or in others. He loved the quiet dramas that take place within an individual nature; he could scent psychologic moments from afar. The twist of a mouth or the lift of an eyebrow meant to him unutterable things. He would carry home with him a gesture, a phrase, a twitch of the mask, and before his comfortable fire sit as in a parquet-box watching a gorgeous third act of his own creation. It should be said here that Louquier was usually right about his third acts and seldom mistook a curtain-raiser for a play. He had a flair. He rejected, at sight, the kind of human being to whom no spiritual adventures come; and could reconcile hysterical imitation a mile away. He despised emotion for emotion's sake. It might be as slight as you liked, but it must be the real thing. He was perfectly sincere in his own amorous misadventure; he suffered as naïvely as a boy of eighteen. His heart was veritably broken, and when he withdrew from the world it was to nurse a real wound.

Louquier had brown eyes, brown hair brown skin, the lean figure that best sorts with that general brownness and half presupposes an eye-glass. He did not, however, wear an eye-glass; and he had large, white, tombstone teeth--not the teeth of his type. He was a good fellow, and popular with men. You see, he never told any one about his passion for other people's crises; he kept it very shyly and decently to himself. Moreover, no one ever brought first-aid to the emotionally injured more promptly than Louquier, so people told him things. Yet as he had no business, and had wandered a good deal (in the most conventional ways), he had no fixed circle of friends. At any given moment, in any given place, he was apt to be rather solitary.

That is enough about Louquier's personality. If you can't "get" him, I can hardly give him to you.

Louquier withdrew, as I say, into himself--retreated to a house that, by accident of a cousin's investment, now the cousin being dead, belonged to him. He had hitherto rented it, for the few years that he had owned it; but the lease had expired, and it struck Louquier that he had never lived in a house of his own. That in itself might give him a sensation--a conventional one, but worth experiencing. As he couldn't marry and had no religion, perhaps it was as near as he would ever come to feeling like a pillar of society. It was really that sense of the curious value of living under one's own vine and fig-tree which drew him. His natural instinct would have been to retire to mountain fastnesses, or discover some Ravenswoodish ruin in which to shiver. You can see that he was very hard hit, and that he was not a subtle person.

The villa was at least remote from the scene of his discomfiture. It was a smallish, comfortable, rather ugly mansion on the bank of the Assiniboine, one of the older houses on Wellington Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Girdled by a high wall, its best rooms arranged at the back, facing the river, to which its tangled garden sloped negligently down, "Whitewood" had a wholly English flavor of privacy and comfort. It was at once modest and sturdy; it lived to itself, and asked favors of no one--least of all the favor of looking into its neighbors' premises. That suited Louquier perfectly; he saw at once that a British tradition was there to offset the newness of Winnipeg. Of course, being officially an American, he couldn't well taste the essence of being "Colonial," but he thought he could be secluded and guindé and "middle" with the best. It quite suited his present temper, and he established himself. Good servants sprang miraculously into being on the spot--probably because he was a bachelor. The Assiniboine was a noble stream; the wall round his garden was very high; it was delightfully incongruous of him to be there at all; he was pleased with himself for having had the courage to come. He felt more steeped in foreignness than if he had done something more exotic. He saw no one, except for necessary business. He did not wish to force the note. He rather liked subjecting his dramatic sense to local color. Still, he never forgot the girl, for he had been very hard hit. At this stage of Louquier's life he even shrank a little from encountering a woman.

Then--it was hard to say just when, for his experience was very gradual--he began to be uncomfortable; he could not precisely say how or why. He had mapped out for himself a course of reading that included some notorious modern Frenchmen. (This was all before the war.) He hoped, I fancy, to get a sensation out of reading Huysmans on the banks of the Assiniboine. Certainly any effect that Huysmans and Catulle Mendès could succeed in producing, in Winnipeg, would be a real effect, not meretriciously aided. The long evenings were a good time to read. During the day, he wandered about out of doors or went about the slow business of regenerating the interior of the house. One of his concessions had been to buy furniture in bulk, on the spot; but there were still gaps to be filled and rearranging to be done. His library was disfigured by a hideous stained-glass window. He was always planning to have it replaced; but in the end he kept it because he thought the Indians would have liked it. You can see how unworthily Louquier amused himself. The fact is that he was very tired of it all--"it all" being life. He was bored with his own depression; but he simply could not bestir himself for an antidote. For a long time he felt, peevishly, that it was up to Wellington Crescent to be the antidote.

The spring came early that year, and, as I said, Louquier spent a good deal of time out of doors. Once, driven forth by this curious mental discomfort which had begun in the late winter, he took a train to Calgary. He returned almost immediately, and while he found that he was glad to get back, still, Calgary had not done for him what he hoped. Calgary was nauseous in retrospect without making him feel that Winnipeg was heaven. The fact is, Winnipeg was no place for Louquier. But his discomfort was of that peculiar kind which one does not run away from. At first it showed itself in mere inability to keep his mind on his book or on anything else. Louquier took a blue-pill and hired a horse to ride. But still he

could not, in the evenings, keep his mind on anything. Then he wondered if the stained-glass window were not responsible: he hated it so. Even with the curtain drawn across it at night, he was conscious of it behind his back. The stained glass was not a picture, and was a design only by courtesy. It looked like what one used to see through an old-fashioned kaleidoscope; or, rather, it looked like circumstantial evidence of a lunatic's having been turned loose in a kindergarten. Yet the weeks went by, and he did not replace it. A morbid indolence was gaining the secret channels of his soul. His mind seemed as complicated an organism as the body, and it felt as your body feels when you have a bad case of grippe--he seemed to have mental hands and feet and vital organs, all of which ached and were tired. Yet he was still perfectly capable of admiring the technique of "En Ménage"--when he could pay attention to it. That was the trouble: he could not concentrate. Each thing refused to hold him and passed him on to another. He was a shuttlecock among a thousand battledores. He was not consciously averse to any of the physical facts of his life, except the stained-glass window. Finally he took to keeping the curtain drawn across it all day; but when the sun struck it, it spotted and dashed and figured the pale silk curtain. That was dreadful--to think that it had power to make over something else in its own indecent likeness. Louquier did rouse himself to act a heavy drapery of red rep hung over it. He felt that life would be better after that; but then the almond-smell began.

Louquier was never able positively to account for the odor of bitter almonds that beset him in the late spring. It had nothing to do with the vegetation at "Whitewood." He sniffed every flower, shrub, and tree to find out. It was not merely in Louquier's mind, for when he went in to town or rode about the environs of Winnipeg he escaped it utterly. Nor was it the natural effluvium of the Assiniboine River. Besides, it was noticeable only in the house. He remarked it at first without suspicion, with a languid curiosity. He was almost happy, the one or two days that he spent sniffing. It gave him something to think about, for a few hours; something to do for its own sake. When he had proved the innocence of nature, he investigated the house. He crept down into the kitchen one afternoon when both the servants were safe elsewhere, opened canisters, and peeped into cupboards. He could find no source for the odor. The almond-smell surrounded him faintly in the kitchen as it did everywhere else, but there was no sharp increase of it in any corner to guide him. So he eliminated the kitchen from his conjectures, but he did not get rid of the smell. It was not unpleasant in itself, but it was too constant. To sit in the library day after day beside the red rep curtain and smell bitter almonds was too much--just too much.

Louquier had, of course, questioned the cook in the beginning; but she had disavowed completely all culinary use of almonds. At last, however--he had sniffed all the furniture by this time, and he was convinced that no upholstery or varnish was responsible--he decided to get rid of the cook. The odor had not been there when he settled in the villa, and that he did not carry the scent upon himself was proved by the fact that only in his own house were his nostrils oppressed by it. Of course he had sniffed through his whole wardrobe. It might be that his cook was an almond-carrier, as some people are typhoid-carriers. Getting rid of her meant getting rid also of his capable man-servant, for the two were united in the bonds of matrimony. It was a great nuisance, for they served him well; but in the end he did it. Louquier could not bring himself to put to the woman a straight question as to whether any of her toilet accessories were almond-scented. He had attested the fact of the pervasive odor and shown that he objected to it; if she used almond soap or anything of the kind, it was up to her, on that hint, to change her cosmetic habit. But there was no sign of her making any such concession to his prejudices. He shrank from active discussion of so personal a matter. He had given hints enough, and his hints were disregarded. Either the woman wasn't responsible, or, being responsible she chose not to reform. There was only one way out: he sacked them both.

The almond episode had no real sequel, but it had two important results. In the first place, the servants were not easily replaced. They left their "situation," undoubtedly spreading tales. Louquier was probably the victim of a servile boycott. At all events, he could not find their equivalents, and he had no friend among the Winnipeg ladies to turn to for counsel. It reduced itself to his getting on with a charwoman who came to get his breakfast and departed after cooking him an early and unspeakably English dinner. An old Scotchman pottered about the garden for a few hours each day. This domestic discomfort was one result of the almond nuisance. The other was a serious impairment of Louquier's nervous condition. The mental discomfort became acute. That he was not the easy prey of obsessions is shown by the fact that he really did, within a week or so after the servants' departure, cease to notice the almond-smell. Had he been a nervous wreck, it would have been only too easy for him to invent the odor for himself; and that he did not do. It was really gone, and his nostrils bore unimpeachable witness to the fact. I do not offer Louquier's refusal to shut up the villa and leave Winnipeg as an evidence of sanity. To leave would have been the most sensible thing he could do. But there his mortal indolence came in. He could go about sniffing, but he could not go about packing. He simply stuck on, the worse for wear. Louquier also, of course, had the universal male illusion: namely, that he was a practical person. It was much more sensible to stay on a few months more and rent, if he could, in the autumn; no one would rent in the spring, anyhow; it would be a bad advertisement to leave so soon; and, besides, he was saving money. Everything you see, combined to keep him there. Early in May he heard from a kind friend that the lady had announced her engagement. That disposed of any wandering notions he might have had of departure. It would be to insult his own heart to pretend it was a casino when it was really a tomb. Meanwhile the mental discomfort grew and grew like a secret malady. 'It is only fair to say that Louquier did not in the least enjoy his own drama. He would have given the world and all to be happy.

By mid-May, Huysmans, Catulle, Mendès et Cie. were flung aside. Louquier simply could not stand literature. He took to American fiction, which again shows his sanity. The novels disgusted him, but for a time they worked; even the love-making did not depress him, for it was very badly done. But after a fortnight the charm failed. He found himself idly inverting all the situations--making the characters (when they were any) sardonically and plausibly do something quite different. His running marginal gloss turned the most ridiculous and optimistic plots into the most logical and depressing horrors. The hero ceased, for Louquier, to rescue the heroine; the heroine walked not unscathed through her vicious context; the villains flourished like the green bay-tree, refusing either to reform or to perish. He stopped reading our serious contemporaries and took to the humorists. But he soon found that one cannot laugh indefinitely alone.

By June Louquier was really in a bad way. If he had not tried to be sensible, he would have done much better; but he was busy adorning his personality with an iron will. At that stage of the game an iron will was about as useful to him as the red curtain over the stained-glass window. He ought, in the interests of health and happiness, to have wobbled a little; to have seized on Falstaffian wisdom and run away. His brown face was growing white with his effort. But Louquier was perfectly sincere in not seeing it that way. Remember, too, that his chosen diversion was failing him. A recluse on the banks of the Assiniboine, he had no third acts to divine. His flair disused, became temporarily lost to him, and he found the Winnipeg streets barren of drama. He could not even reconstruct the tragedy of his own charwoman, though obviously every charwoman must have had one. The Scotch gardener was as impenetrable as a Scotch mist. Louquier gave up riding; he gave up his blue-pills; he stuck to his own vine and upas-tree. If he had not always expected to leave Winnipeg in the autumn, I think he would have gone under. But he did not--quite.

By June Louquier was afraid. Up to that time he had not experienced fear; his condition had stopped at acute discomfort. It was very like a bodily ailment, not serious, for which people try home remedies. The home remedies had not worked, but he was not going to a specialist for a malady that seemed to attack him in one spot as much as, and no more than in another. He would, you might say, hardly know whether to choose an aurist or an orthopedist. His broken heart, his indolence, and his iron will combined to keep him passive; and he called it being sensible. Thanks to the girl, flavor had gone out of life like the taste out of honey; it was a thick, insipid glue. It was wearing; it was disagreeable; but it could be borne, since other men had borne it. Then, as I say, fear came.

Louquier was sitting alone in his library--the time was June--trying to read. The charwoman had left a few hours since; the gardener, of course, long before that. Quite suddenly he realized that he had a new fact to reckon with. He laid his book down very softly on the table, rose, by the aid of his iron will, from his chair, and walked slowly across to the corner of the room between the fireplace and the built-in book-shelves. A light chair that stood in his way he moved, first passing his hand across its satin seat. Then he took his stand in the exact corner of the room, facing outward, arms truculently folded. He stood there for about five minutes, his eyes glancing hither and yon. Then he walked back, lugged his easy-chair over by the fireplace and set it with its back to the wall. Before leaving it, he passed his hand carefully down the wall behind it. Then he moved the table, with the lamp, over beside the arm-chair. Thus the chair was hemmed in between the square table on one side and the jutting chimney-breast on the other. Behind it was a windowless wall. Louquier then sat down and took up his book again. He knew as well as if he had seen it with his eyes or heard it with his ears, where the thing was that disturbed him, but he refused to treat it as anything more than a manifestation of impudence. He trusted that by, putting it, as it were, in its place, he could teach it manners--perhaps discourage it finally. The presence was perceptible to no sense; it flowed from spot to spot as quietly as air; but Louquier knew at any given moment where it was. He knew, too, whether it faced him or turned away; and he was more comfortable when it turned away. He kept his eyes on his book; he turned over pages; he even lighted and smoked a cigarette. He put up a brave front to the beastly thing. All the same, he knew that if it did not go away he should sit there all night. He was not going to turn his back to it, to pass through the door; and he would not, positively would not (here was the iron will), back out of the room. Besides, if the thing followed him up-stairs, it would be worse. He could not switch on the up-stairs lights from below. It was very curious, how much he seemed to know about the thing--its size, for example, and the measure of its gait as it moved. He had even a vague impression of its shape, though his eye could not detect the faintest alteration in the look of the spot where it so definitely stood. He had as yet no means of knowing whether it was malevolent or not, but he loathed it. Occasionally he looked up from his book, oriented the presence, and looked directly at it with bored and scornful eyes. That was all he could do--get up again he would not. Nor would he speak to it. He had a curious conviction that that way lay madness. No; he would meet it on its own ground. It moved, and he might move; it directed itself in some unnamable way toward him, and he would stare at it insolently; it occupied its place, and he would defiantly occupy his own. But he would not speak; he would not probe the laws of its being further than itself announced them. The merest visual sign would have been an immense relief to him--a devil with cloven hoof, a ghost draped in white, would have been child's play. Then he could have trusted his eye or his ear; as it was, he had to depend wholly on this nameless sense which placed his enemy for him. That nameless sense must not get blunted. He must keep very wide awake lest his enemy steal a march on him. Above all, he must not pretend to be unaware, and at the same time must pretend not to be frightened. How much intelligence the thing had, of course he did not know. It might be laughing at his bluff, but at least he would keep it up. He hoped he should not grow sleepy. He had long since given up coffee and other stimulants. Louquier had become a man for whom there is absolutely no sense in keeping awake.

After an hour, during, which Louquier turned over just forty pages--he kept careful track of his intervals--the thing departed by the door open into the hall. Louquier felt it go. He had a very pretty problem to face then: whether to follow it or not. If he did not, it meant sitting all night in his library--a great nuisance and a craven act. It would prove to the thing that he was afraid of it, and that would be exceedingly unfortunate. He ought, of course, to pretend that he was tired and wanted to go to bed--and to go. On the other hand, it was going to be a difficult business to blow out the lamp, walk into a dark hall, and mount the dark stairs to his bedroom. True, he could not see the thing, even in the lighted room; but he doubted if, in the dark, he could place it at all. It could be lived with only if it could be placed--delimited, as it were. He would not answer for his perfect conduct if the thing turned out to be lurking in the hall. He had no clue whatever to the intelligence of this besetting presence; but he felt, somehow, that it gauged him by the visual signs he gave. It might, if he stayed there, know that he was afraid of it; still, it might not be clever enough to make that inference. Whereas if he rushed out into the darkness, he could not answer for what he should do--something, very likely, that would show beyond question how terrified he was. He might even blunder into the thing itself, in the dark. He was by no means sure that it was perceptible even to the touch, yet he dreaded the thought of such an impact as though it had been certain death. There was nothing for him to do but stay--though, for all he knew, the thing might already have wandered out into the night. He would not even get up and shut the door. How did he know whether doors were an obstacle to it? And if it should elect to come back, through the closed door, he would be more mocked than ever to say nothing of the sense he would have of being shut in with it, without redress. No, there was nothing for it but for him to stay--and to fend off sleep somehow. If he should drowse and it should return, he would be left to its unclean mercy. Louquier was angry. First, the girl; then the stained-glass and the bitter almonds; then the recognized but unadmitted stupidity of his whole Winnipeg idea; the acute discomfort--and now this.

Louquier got through the night without mischance. Toward dawn he grew so sleepy that nothing but sleep seemed to matter; his stupor blunted all his nerves. He fell asleep in his chair, indeed, and woke up with the streaming light of morning. The room was clear and free; you would never have guessed that anything save the commonplace had inhabited it. Naturally, Louquier took the line of wondering if he had not eaten something that oppressed him; though why boiled lettuce should introduce you to the supernatural--! The memory was vivid, however, and he saw a man about installing electric switches below-stairs--one inside the library door, and one in the hall outside. The business took a day or two, and until it was done Louquier went straight from his dining-room to his bedroom, locked the door, and read there. He did not sleep very well on these nights. For one thing, he was acutely ashamed of being up-stairs behind a locked door; for another, he had a very definite conception--though he had no corroborative "sense" of it--of the thing's ranging about below in unholy and unlawful occupation of his, Louquier's, premises. No man really likes to pull the bedclothes over his head while the burglar is frankly stealing the plate below even though he may wisely choose to do so; and that is precisely what it seemed to Louquier that he was doing. Still he was not going, for any consideration of mere dignity, to risk another encounter until he had guarded his exit with electricity. With the lights properly installed, electric switches marking his natural line of progress from after-dinner coffee to bed, he returned to his habit of spending the evening in the library. The fact that there was nothing he really wanted to read--ergo, no joy to be had in sitting there, anyhow--tipped all his plans and precautions with irony. Still, a man has to assume that his routine--whatever it may be--has an unimpeachable reason for being or he has given up the game completely. Louquier was not ready to destroy his convention and let life depart.

The next fortnight, to Louquier, was a long, cumulative agony. There would be no point in making a diary of it; given the initial facts, psychic and physical, which I have tried to make clear, one has only to

let logic deal with the situation. Each day became, in its turn, a new irritation as well as a fresh irritant. Night after night he faced the thing in his library. Its hours of appearing and disappearing differed slightly, from evening to evening; it chose, apparently, not to work like an automaton or a mechanism, but to create to the end its impression of individuality, of volition. It kept its appointment irregularly, as though it had other engagements; but it always kept it.

Of course, in the long irrelevant, sunlit hours, he balanced in his mind the possibilities of the thing's getting at his sanity. But he took his sanity objectively, too. If his body was the citadel that must not crumble, his healthy mind was the garrison within that must, if possible, live on, and live on without surrendering. He did not want to crawl out by any subterranean passage, and then make a hopeless running fight of it. Not he! He stood on his rights; but he stood even more, soldier-fashion, on his counted ammunition and the state of his supplies. You could not truthfully say, however, that the wall was unbreached. There were some nasty little breaks in it here and there--as if the girl, the stained-glass, and the almond-smell, the unaccountable discomfort of all the months, had been spies doing effective work within while awaiting the real coup. Louquier was not, nervously, all that he might have been. Already, after a fortnight, he felt less able to combat the thing. If it had appeared irregularly, so that Louquier could have held it, to any extent, dependent on outside causes--the weather, his digestion, anything--it would have been easier. But whatever else might come or go, and though it chose its precise hour to suit itself, it never failed him "Old Faithful," he jeered silently to himself once. Sometime between dusk and dawn he could be sure of it. In the third week of his siege he began definitely to fear that he could not keep up his bluff much longer. He had a horrid vision of some surrendering gesture--of his speaking to it, or going on his knees to it. He loathed it almost more than he feared it. It seemed a dishonorable enemy for a man to be up against. He would not be treated like a soldier and a gentlemen, if he did surrender.

Then came a night when Louquier walked from dining-room to library, preternaturally grave. He felt so sapped and shrunken that he wasted no gestures in bravado. He let himself walk like a tired man--which he was. He put his tobacco beside him; he piled up his books; he passed his hand over the hollow of the chair before seating himself; he shook the lamp a little to see if there was oil enough to last out the night, if, need be. All that was mere ritual--and how tired he was of it! If the thing would only let up on him for once give him a rest, a chance to revictual himself and bury his dead! This inevitable vigilance was like a cancer, eating daily further into his vital tissue. Should he never again be able to live carelessly, as other men do? In an hour, or two hours, or three, he would look up from his book and be aware of its entrance; would diagnose its actual mood and select his mask accordingly; would go through the same difficult and wearisome ordeal. When, its whim was spent, and it took leave of him, he would go up-stairs to bed. Toward morning he would sleep. He had never shut the door against it, judging that his state of mind would be worse if, to his knowledge, it came through a closed door. He left the portal hospitably open, and it entered like any human through the passage provided. Good God! how bored he was!

He did not have to wait long to-night. It came as early as if it had rushed straight from dinner. Immediately he knew how it placed itself--in a Morris-chair opposite him, beside a French window that led into the garden. There was something jaunty and flippant in its manner. Absurd though it may sound to speak of the thing's manner, it is quite within the facts as Louquier's mind registered them. He was aware, as I have said, of its gait; some stir of the displaced air where it moved informed him. He perceived, though by none of the five senses, mass and coherence in this creature, just as some hitherto useless convolution of his brain registered its temper. It breathed its humor to him to-night in some exact, unnamable way. Louquier leaned his head back and waited. Perhaps it would go early; perhaps it

had merely looked in to remind him, and would presently be off, having other Stygian fish to fry. He hoped so, for he was very tired. He even felt drowsiness coming on before its time, and Louquier had no spur to prick him awake. None but fear; and its sharp edge was blunted with much roweling of his own flesh. He closed his eyes occasionally for an instant, as one does to push sleep out with the firm, sudden gesture of opening the eyelids. And at last, in one of those lightning brief intervals, the thing moved toward him. The event was all too quick for Louquier to think, to diagnose afresh its mood. He knew only, as he had never known before, that he must have done with it. He had reached the point known to all of us--though, thank Heaven, in other contexts--when ennui becomes a passion like hatred or blood-lust, when weariness turns from a sigh to a shriek. And with that sense he knew that the enemy was at last in the citadel. His sanity was threatened. He dared wait no longer for its moment. Louquier caught up a light chair that stood near and brought it heavily down on the spot where the thing stood. The slim chair rocked on its broken legs, and sank down in a mass of splinters. For the first time Louquier turned his back on the presence and fled from the room. He did not care; he was not afraid any more as he rushed up the stairs; he was only passionately excited and conscious of relief at having at last acted, in however mad a way. All his sanity had gone into the blow; it was Louquier's protest, the protest of the whole of him, of the integral man, against the sly and foul attack on his integrity. That was what the thing had desired--to resolve his integrity, to riddle his ego, and shred up his very soul; to leave him incapable of saying "I" with conviction. It had wanted to disintegrate Louquier, to smash his singleness into bits, to turn him to a loose agglomeration of mental dust--so that no man again should be able to say, "This is Louquier." Louquier knew as well as any of us that you do not combat the psychic fact with physical weapons, yet the violent gesture had seemed his only way out. Though he could not hope to destroy the thing, he could perhaps prove to it that he was not a mere puddle of fear. Practically, it was as silly as trying to stab a ghost; yet it had counted to Louquier himself. He had no notion that he had hurt the thing, but he had shown that his muscles were still at the service of his hatreds. Just before he rose, he had felt himself going; the very marrow of his nature oozing away through unguessed channels. By that one gesture the faithful flesh had saved him.

Or, at least, so he thought, standing in his bedroom, erect and panting, facing the door with clenched hands. A trickle of blood across one knuckle elated him; it showed that he had put forth strength, that the chair had really crashed and splintered under his hands. Within him, the blood pumped through his heart; he felt its healthy, impatient motions through his body. Would the thing rush up the stairs to avenge itself? He did not care. Let it come. It might kill him, but not, now, before he had made his gesture; not before he had let it know how he loathed it, and how little it had mesmerized his spirit. He could at least die a free man, overmatched, but not cowed. For the first time in months Louquier felt genial, like a man playing an honest part in a world of other men. All the last weeks he had seemed to himself isolated, shamefully as a criminal is isolated, because he is not worthy to associate with others. All the things that had happened to him had seemed chosen and selected for the purpose of showing him that he was small game of a very dirty sort.

Louquier, standing there, triumphant over the unreal, with blood on his knuckles from a smashed and splintered chair, is an absurd figure to the inward eye. He was more like a silly and complacent drunken gentleman than a hero who has fought with the powers of darkness. I am aware of that. But Louquier, to whom, aforesaid, a lifted hand or a *révérence de la cour* could seem, for reasons, an epic gesture, did not see himself in that light. He was conscious only that for the first time since he had said good-bye to the girl, he had expressed himself. Hanging the red rep curtain, for example, had been the mere pout of the esthete. Sacking the cook was a weak artificial gesture. But now he walked into his dressing-room and washed the blood--it was only a drop or two--off his knuckle with the beautiful physical simplicity of

a navvy. It was an honorable wound; and honorable wounds got in the day's work you stanch as quickly as you can.

Louquier's sense of the presence had never worked, away from it. He did not know whether it remained below or had departed from his house. It had not followed him, and after half an hour he realized that it did not mean to leap to its revenge. he mused a little, strategically. It seemed possible that his enemy, insulted by a mere thing of flesh, might bide its time--wait for him to sleep and then pursue him. He fancied it very angry; so angry, perhaps, that it would not leave his roof before it had struck back. Note that Louquier, on reaffirming his independence, in defying his terror, had no sense whatever of stepping out from under an obsession. The thing was not an obsession; it was real, and it had been--perhaps still was--there. His conception of facts had not been false; his attitude to them, only, had been wrong. He realized, for example, that he must watch until morning, for he still did not wish to be helpless in sleep before his enemy. So far as he knew, the only power that could prevail against it was the sovereign sun. Still the practical man, he made with alert and vivid gestures his preparations for the night: drew an easy-chair under the light, put on a comfortable dressing-gown, set a pitcher of cold water on the table beside him, and took up one of the humorists. Tobacco was not forgotten. It was an hour or more, though, before he either smoked or read; for quite that length of time he waited for a sign. The silence of night ebbed and flowed around him. External sounds--a voice, carriage wheels, the stir of an animal in the shrubbery--fell across it occasionally; but every now and then he would seem to reach some central pool of stillness, and then that sense in him which perceived the presence would be strainingly on its guard. No sign came, however--none at all; and after an hour he relaxed a little and lighted a pipe.

The hours that followed were singularly monotonous. Suspicion, reassurance, false alarms and quick reactions followed one another interminably. Louquier was perfectly sure that something would happen before morning; that his enemy, having perfected its plan, would mount in search of him. Thence resulted a curious ignorance of how time was passing. He had covered his watch with a cushion so as not to hear its ticking, for though the straining of the sense was not listening, it was more like a listening than anything else. The dawn, when it came, was incredible to him; it seemed impossible that the thing should not have struck before fleeing, though the dim light on the waters of the Assiniboine proved to him that he was safe. Louquier, still half-dressed, threw himself on his bed and slept. He dreamed, a chain of dreams, about the girl, and woke jaded.

The disapproving charwoman had set out his breakfast in response to his ring from above-stairs. Louquier went straight to the dining-room and ate. His first cigarette he took outside in the garden; there was time enough, in all conscience, to revisit the battle-field. To him, among the flower-beds, appeared the charwoman, twisting her apron in red, wet hands. She had found the heap of broken wood, and all the self-righteousness of her clan was in arms. She had not touched nothing, so help her; she had looked in with her mop and all, before breakfast, and--she had seen what she had seen. She had not gone in; she had left things as they was for the master to see with his own eyes. Louquier, standing on the threshold of the garden door, his back to the light, realized swiftly that there were three possibilities--to affect not to believe her, to admit that he had done it himself, or to say that it was very curious and perfectly incomprehensible. It does not matter which one he chose, for it is plain to see that with charring easy come by, to say nothing of plenty of places nearer 'ome, and her with three children to leave all day by theirselves--it is plain to see that all three must inevitably have led to the same conclusion. Either she had been called a liar, or Louquier drank, or he couldn't keep other people from playing the monkey with his property. The charwoman, of course, gave notice, to take effect after dinner that evening. Louquier thought for a moment of asking the gardener if he could cook; but what

ever the gardener could have cooked, Louquier knew certainly he could not have eaten. Nor would he for the twentieth time consult an employment agency in vain. It was a dog's life, and he wouldn't live it. He would go to a hotel.

You are not to think that Louquier intended even then to run away. He formed, during the day, a somewhat complicated plan. Mingled with the relief of his decision to sleep and eat elsewhere--the charwoman, showing a proper pride to the last, burned everything she cooked for him that day--was the annoyance of realizing that he must also stick by. He must not really leave the house; he must spend much of his day there. Also--and this was most important of all--he must be at his post during the long evening. If the thing returned, it must find him on the spot. His relation to it had become to Louquier the most important present fact of life, the fact he could least ignore. If it did not come--well, after, say, three nights, he might honorably assume that it did not intend to return. Then he could shut up the villa and leave Winnipeg, if he liked. The practical man could no longer insist that he was saving money by living in his own house if he was sleeping and eating at an inn. He could tell the agent that he found it hard to get satisfactory servants; that wouldn't give the house a black eye. The practical man, absolved and justified, could go anywhere he liked, having done, in perfect dignity, with his Winnipeg adventure. You may infer from all this that Louquier was a different man after dealing, in however absurd a way, with his enemy. But he was not precisely different; he had merely, as it were, rearranged the furniture; a number of things had gone into the attic. His mind was in no sense a new house, or even a refurnished one. To prove this, I have only to tell you that Louquier felt his enemy, if anything more actual, more dangerous, than during the long vigil in his bedroom the night before. It had not perished. Was a mock-Sheraton chair ever known to destroy an elemental being? The fact that it had delayed its revenge seemed to Louquier significant and appalling, and reinforced his conception of it as a creature of complicated intelligence. It was not a mere evil impulse itself in windy, ungoverned ways. It could control itself, hold off, plan--achieve, probably. It is no exaggeration to say that Louquier looked forward to the evening as being very probably fatal to him. If his will had not already been made, he would, I fancy, have made it that day. You are to realize that Louquier did not feel himself strong; he only felt himself decent. He had hit back and proved himself normal. What gesture he should find to meet it with again, he did not know--perhaps none. For that matter, it might bring seven other devils with it when it came again. Louquier was very tired, and his domestic arrangements and disarrangements did not make him less so. At the end of the afternoon he flung himself down in his hotel bedroom and slept, waking only in time for a late and hasty dinner. He dressed for dinner, too, which cut his margin down. As he got into a cab and gave his own address to the driver, he had all the sense of being late for an important engagement. He distinctly wanted to be first on the ground. Besides, he had to light up the house and fling open the windows--to say nothing of arranging the library, as usual, for the encounter.

First on the ground he was. He had plenty of time to make his preparations to the last detail. He was more tired than he remembered having been at all; but he had taken coffee and did not fear sleep. He thought with irritation of the tourist crowd he had left in the hotel--a mob with suit-cases, ready to go on to Banff and Lake Louise. They had been very irrelevant to his own situation--or was he merely irrelevant to theirs? Sitting in his library, he recalled their fantastic hats and voices. Suppose he had kidnapped one or two of them, and chucked them into his library there above the Assiniboine! He felt injured; he almost wished he could have.

The evening lengthened; and still Louquier sat there, back against the wall, flimsily barricaded as usual. The thing was late, very late. Ten o'clock, and still it had not come. He read a little, or pretended to, then at last lit a cigarette. And as if the striking of the match had been a signal, his enemy entered. Louquier's heart sank; he knew then that all day, beneath his certainty, he had nursed a frail hope that it would not

return; that it had had enough of him. Just as always, his sense placed it for him, showed him here it moved and how it felt. It moved haltingly, jerking from corner to corner, as if the anger in his famous gesture had maimed it. But it did not sit down. It moved about the room in odd curves and tangents, limping ever a little nearer to Louquier. Louquier could not stir; he could not even, this time, rise. Never had the thing so concentrated its emotion on him; it focused him as with straight glances from its invisible eyes. He had not dreamed that he, that any man, could be hated like that. The thing was hate, as God is love. It came swerving toward him like a drunken doom. Louquier sat braced in his chair, his right hand, with the lighted cigarette, shaking. There was no redress for this; the thing had stripped itself of manner and of all hypocrisy. It was coming; it was on him. Intenser than a physical touch, it covered him, pushing him back against the cushions until the chair strained and it creaked. His head bent backward over the rim of the chair--his neck felt like to break. Had it been human, its breath would have suffocated him, so close was its invisible countenance to his. He could not move his legs or feet, or his left arm, but his right elbow, pushed out across the wideish arm of the chair, had a little margin still. He drove his elbow out farther, then strained up a tense forearm and dug the lighted cigarette into the air directly in front of his own face. So complete was his consciousness of this terrible imponderable thing that he expected it to feel pain. He held the cigarette there implacably, not three inches from his own nose. In about ten seconds the lighted end went out. Yet he held it there, as if the dead cigarette could still brand his enemy. Slowly, very slowly, he got the sense of the thing's slipping from him, of its weakly pulling away. It seemed to withdraw, a loose and diminished being, out into the room. He could lift his head again; he could lean forward, could stir his legs and feet. It was still there, but its hatred seemed weaker, like the hatred of a sick man. Louquier's eyes never left it, but he threw away the cigarette stub and reached out to the box at his left for another, which he lighted and began to smoke. His neck and ached shockingly, and he was limp from the pressure of his antagonist--that curious, weightless pressure on his body, as of air on the lungs. As he smoked, he watched it. It drew farther and farther away, proceeding now with indecision, different indeed from the angry lurches by which it had approached him. It seemed vaguer, weaker, almost helpless. For an instant it seemed to Louquier that the thing was groping for the door and could not find it--as if he had blinded it. Then it disappeared utterly, flowing aimlessly, feebly, across the threshold. He was aware of it to the last--knowing even the moment of its crossing the threshold and, the instant when there was no vestige left of it.

For a half-hour Louquier sat on in his library, smoking but not pretending to read. The thing would not come back that night, he knew; it had gone with all the gestures of defeat. He left the house then, though he took the precaution of leaving the light in the hall to burn on until daylight. He wanted no ambushes. Walking through the garden to the street was perhaps the worst moment Louquier had ever had, for the night was at his back. Safe in his bed at the hotel; he fell instantly asleep, and did not wake until the sun was high.

Louquier had been tired many times in Winnipeg--during the last month almost continuously so. But his weariness on this day was such a weariness of the body as he had not hitherto known. He felt sick, as if he had drunk deep the night before; he had all the sensations of recovering from orgy. His face in the mirror frightened him. Positively, it was a marvel that he had stood out against his enemy as he had. He had a desperate desire to send the keys to his agent and to fling himself into a train; but after a day of conflict, during which all his food tasted fever-soaked, and his feet seemed cunningly wrapped in lead, he decided that he must go back once more to Wellington Crescent. After that, he would be free. Louquier's ardor had ebbed; the magnificent physical rage that had enabled him to smash the chair down upon his enemy, and then rush past it up the stairs, even the tense and quiet determination with which he had pushed the lighted cigarette into its face, were gone. He was very clear as to what had happened. The thing had nearly had him; his mind was just on the point of surrendering before its

advance, and the stupid, loyal flesh had stepped in and saved him. Twice his arm had been lifted, by no conscious volition of his own, when his brain had accepted defeat. What he had feared the first time was madness; the second time he had feared only death. Still, even from that lesser catastrophe it was his body that had defended him, and with no orders from him. The body had done enough; he ought to give it rest, let its noble instincts relax and recuperate. Suppose he went again: would it not be too much to ask of the taxed flesh? He had no reason to suppose that if he spent another evening in his unloved library, anything whatever would "happen." He fancied the thing was tired of the game. Yet he could not promise that; and he knew that, should it reappear, he could not combat it with mind alone. Never, for example, could he focus his weary emotions sufficiently to meet its hatred with like hatred--if, indeed, anything human could. This thing carried no useless baggage; it could give itself entirely to its business of hating; and its capacity was one of the well-kept secrets of the universe. No; if he met it again, he would have simply to hope that his body would make another effort. He had done nothing, really, except register his attitude to the presence; but that only his body had been capable of doing. He had expressed himself to it only in two wild, instinctive gestures. Would there be strength enough there for another, if another were needed? How could he go?

Yet, in the end, Louquier went. He could never have done with the enemy until he had passed an evening in his library unvisited by it. He longed passionately to ask someone to go with him. A bell-boy from the hotel would do. But he knew such an evening would be no test. He ordered a cab to come for him at eleven, and told the driver not to ring the bell, but to whistle outside. When he reached the gate, it seemed to him that he could not enter; but something--the rusted remnant of his iron will, perhaps--carried him in. In his pocket he had a loaded pistol--a quaint notion, which none the less gave him some comfort. Completely uncorporeal as the thing was, it seemed to understand his motions. He could not speak to it; his silent spirit could not communicate with its silence; he could make it know what he felt about it, apparently, only by the gestures of some low fellow in a rage. Oh, it was a vulgar beast!

Pistol cocked in his hand, Louquier sat through his first half-hour, waiting. There was no sign of its approach. Then, little by little, he became aware that it was not going to come. So slowly did this assurance gain on him that he knew it only as a deepening peace, gradual as the long Northern twilight. The room was splendidly empty of the presence--empty of it to all eternity. He could fling his keys at the agent, and take a train to-morrow. He had the definite sense of having crossed something; of being on the other side of a gulf; of having emerged from a region of horror and having left a big neutral space between it and him. It even came over him as he sat there, healthily lulled, that he had, without knowing it, experienced a third act of his own. Louquier's enemy was at last, for him, behind foot-lights. He had got his grip, and could now deal with the episode as drama. It "composed" for him: clear proof that he was blessedly outside it; and that he was again (as it had intended he never should be) Louquier. His weariness became pleasant, turned to a velvet drowsiness. Not once, since the girl had rejected him, had he known such peace. He could almost, with half-shut eyes, envisage a future--a happy future that he could build with patience and delight. Louquier drowsed, sunk in his chair. He knew now that it would not come, and he felt safe as a child in its cradle. He was too dog-tired to mind the discomfort of his position. Presently he slept profoundly, his head on his curled arm.

The cabman's whistle sounded in the late evening and Louquier came up through layers of sleep to greet it. In that waking instant before the pattern of life is wholly clear, he jumped, startled. His cramped, unconscious, fingers closed tight on the trigger of the pistol, and he fired, as neatly as if he had meant to. Louquier was even spared the knowledge of what he had done, for the bullet, knowing what it was made for and knowing nothing else, went straight. For he had won his moral victory; and there was

nothing left his baffled enemy but to stoop to physical accident. At last the impatient cabman's ring peeled through the house, but no one answered it.

(End.)

<http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/louquier.htm>

Zeritsky's Law

By ANN GRIFFITH

Illustrated by THORNE

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Why bother building a time machine when there's
something much easier to find right in your own kitchen?

Somebody someday will make a study of the influence of animals on history. Although not as famous as Mrs. O'Leary's cow, Mrs. Graham's cat should certainly be included in any such study. It has now been definitely established that the experiences of this cat led to the idea of quick-frozen people, which, in turn, led to the passage of Zeritsky's Law.

We must go back to the files of the Los Angeles newspapers for 1950 to find the story. In brief, a Mrs. Fred C. Graham missed her pet cat on the same day that she put a good deal of food down in her home deep-freeze unit. She suspected no connection between the two events. The cat was not to be found until six days later, when its owner went to fetch something from the deep-freeze. Much as she loved her pet, we may imagine that she was more horror than grief-stricken at her discovery. She lifted the little ice-encased body out of the deep-freeze and set it on the floor. Then she managed to run as far as the next door neighbor's house before fainting.

Mrs. Graham became hysterical after she was revived, and it was several hours before she could be quieted enough to persuade anybody that she hadn't made up the whole thing. She prevailed upon her neighbor to go back to the house with her. In front of the deep-freeze they found a small pool of water, and a wet cat, busily licking itself. The neighbor subsequently told reporters that the cat was concentrating its licking on one of its hind legs, where some ice still remained, so that she, for one, believed the story.

A follow-up dispatch, published a week later, reported that the cat was unharmed by the adventure. Further, Mrs. Graham was quoted as saying that the cat had had a large meal just before its disappearance; that as soon after its rescue as it had dried itself off, it took a long nap, precisely as it always did after a meal; and that it was not hungry again until evening. It was clear from the accounts that the life processes had been stopped dead in their tracks, and had, after defrosting, resumed at exactly the point where they left off.

Perhaps it is unfair to put all the responsibility on one luckless cat. Had such a thing happened anywhere else in the country, it would have been talked about, believed by a few, disbelieved by most, and forgotten. But as the historic kick of Mrs. O'Leary's cow achieved significance because of the time and place that it was delivered, so the falling of Mrs. Graham's cat into the deep-freeze became significant because it occurred in Los Angeles. There, and probably only there, the event was anything but forgotten; the principles it revealed became the basis of a hugely successful business.

How shall we regard the Zeritsky Brothers? As archvillains or pioneers? In support of the latter view, it must be admitted that the spirit of inquiry and the willingness to risk the unknown were indisputably theirs. However, their pioneering--if we agree to call it that--was, equally indisputably, bound up with the quest for a fast buck.

Some of their first clients paid as high as \$15,000 for the initial freezing, and the exorbitant rate of \$1,000 per year as a storage charge. The Zeritsky Brothers owned and managed one of the largest quick-freezing plants in the world, and it was their claim that converting the freezing equipment and storage facilities to accommodate humans was extremely expensive, hence the high rates.

When the early clients who paid these rates were defrosted years later, and found other clients receiving the same services for as little as \$3,000, they threatened a row and the Zeritskys made substantial refunds. By that time they could easily afford it, and since any publicity about their enterprise was unwelcome to them, all refunds were made without a whimper. \$3,000 became the standard rate, with \$100 per year the storage charge, and no charge for defrosting.

The Zeritskys were businessmen, first and last. Anyone who had the fee could put himself away for whatever period of time he wished, and no questions asked. The ironclad rule that full payment must be made in

advance was broken only once, as far as the records show.

A certain young man had a very wealthy uncle, residing in Milwaukee, whose heir he was, but the uncle was not getting along in years fast enough. The young man, then 18 years old, did not wish to waste the "best years of his life" as a poor boy. He wanted the money while he was young, but his uncle was as healthy as he was wealthy. The Zeritskys were the obvious answer to his problem.

The agreement between them has been preserved. They undertook to service the youth without advance payment. They further undertook to watch the Milwaukee papers until the demise of the uncle should be reported, whereupon they would defrost the boy. In exchange for this, the youth, thinking of course that money would be no object when he came out, agreed to pay double.

The uncle lived 17 years longer, during which time he seems to have forgotten his nephew and to have become deeply interested in a mystic society, to which he left his entire fortune. The Zeritskys duly defrosted the boy, and whether they or he were the more disappointed is impossible to imagine. They never forgot the lesson, and never made another exception to their rule.

He, poor fellow, spent the rest of his life, including the best years, paying off his debt which, at \$3,000 plus 17 years at \$100 per year, and the whole doubled, amounted to \$9,400. The books record his slow but regular payments over the next 43 years, and indicate that he had only \$250 left to pay when he died. We may, I think, assume that various underworld characters who were grateful ex-clients of the Zeritskys were instrumental in persuading the boy to keep up his payments.

Criminals were the first to apply for quick-freezing, and formed the mainstay of the Zeritskys' business through the years. What more easy than to rob, hide the loot (except for that all-important advance payment), present yourself to the Zeritskys and remain in their admirable chambers for five or ten years, emerge to find the hue and cry long since died down and the crime forgotten, recover your haul and live out your life in luxury?

Due to the shady character of most of their patrons, the Zeritskys kept all records by a system of numbers. Names never appeared on the books, and anonymity was guaranteed.

Law enforcement agents, looking for fugitives from justice, found no way to break down this system, nor any law which they could interpret as making it illegal to quick-freeze. Perhaps the truth is that they did not search too diligently for a law that could be made to apply. As long as the Zeritskys kept things quiet and did not advertise or attract public attention, they could safely continue their bizarre business.

City officials of Los Angeles, and particularly members of the police force, enjoyed a period of unparalleled prosperity. Lawyers and other experts who thought they were on the track of legal means by which to liquidate the Zeritsky empire found themselves suddenly able to buy a ranch or a yacht or both, and retire forever from the arduous task of earning a living.

Even with a goodly part of the population of Los Angeles as permanent pensioners, the Zeritsky fortune grew to incredible proportions. By the time the Zeritsky Brothers died and left the business to their sons, it was a gold mine, and an inexhaustible one at that.

During these later years, the enterprise began to attract a somewhat better class of people. Murderers and other criminals continued to furnish the bulk of the business, but as word of this amazing service seeped through the country, others began to see in it an easy way of solving their problems. They were encouraged, too, by the fact that the process was painless, and the firm completely reliable. There were no risks, no accidents, no fatalities. One could, in short, have confidence in the Zeritskys.

Soon after Monahan's great exposure rocked the nation, however, many of these better-type clients leaped into print to tell their experiences.

One of the most poignant stories came from the daughter of a Zeritsky client. Her father was still, at the age of one hundred and two, passionately interested in politics, but the chances of his lasting until the next election were not good. The daughter herself suggested the deep freeze, and he welcomed the idea. He decided on a twenty year stay because, in his own words, "If the Republicans can't get into the White House in twenty years, I give up." Upon his return, he found that his condition had not been fulfilled. His daughter described him as utterly baffled by the new world. He lived in it just a week before he left it, this time for good. She states his last words were, "How do you people stand it?"

Some professional people patronized the Zeritskys, chiefly movie stars. After the expose, fan magazines were filled with accounts of how the stars had kept youthful. The more zealous ones had prolonged their screen lives for years by the simple expedient of storing themselves away between pictures. We may imagine the feelings of their public upon discovering that the seemingly eternal youth of their favorites was due to the Zeritskys and not, as they had been led to believe, to expensive creams, lotions, diet and exercise. There was a distinctly unfavorable reaction, and the letter columns of the fan magazines bristled with angry charges of cheating.

But next to criminals, the majority of people who applied for quick-freezing seems to have been husbands or wives caught in insupportable marital situations. Their experiences were subsequently written up in the confession magazines. It was usually, the husband who fled to Los Angeles and incarcerated himself for an appropriate number of years, at the end of which time his unamiable spouse would have died or made other arrangements. If we can believe the magazines, this scheme worked out very well in most cases.

There was, inevitably, one spiteful wife who divined her husband's intentions. By shrewd reasoning, she figured approximately the number of years he had chosen to be absent, and put herself away for a like period. In a TV dramatization rather pessimistically entitled _You Can't Get Away_, the husband described his sensations upon being defrosted after 15 years, only to find his wife waiting for him, right there in the reception room of the Zeritsky plant.

"She was as perfectly preserved as I was," he said. "Every irritating habit that had made my life unbearable with her was absolutely intact."

The sins of the fathers may be visited on the sons, but how often we see repeated the old familiar pattern of the sons destroying the lifework of the fathers! The Zeritsky Brothers were fanatically meticulous. They supervised every detail of their operations, and kept their records with an elaborate system of checks and doublechecks. They were shrewd enough to realize that complete dependability was essential to their business. A satisfied Zeritsky client was a silent client. One dissatisfied client would be enough to blow the business apart.

The sons, in their greed, over-expanded to the point where they could not, even among the four of them, personally supervise each and every detail. A fatal mistake was bound to occur sooner or later. When it did, the victim broadcast his grievance to the world.

The story appeared in a national magazine, every copy of which was sold an hour after it appeared on the stands. Under the title _They Put the Freeze on Me!_ John A. Monahan told his tragic tale. At the age of 37, he had fallen desperately in love with a girl of 16. She was immature and frivolous and wanted to "play around" a little more before she settled down.

"She told me," he wrote, "to come back in five years, and that started me thinking. In five years I'd be 42, and what would a girl of 21 want with a man twice as old as her?"

John Monahan moved in circles where the work of the Zeritskys was well known. Not only did he see an opportunity of being still only 37 when his darling reached 21, but he foresaw a painless way of passing the years which he must endure without her. Accordingly, he presented himself for the deep-freeze, paid his \$3,000 and the \$500 storage charge in advance, and left, he claimed, "written instructions to let me out in five years, so there'd be no mistakes."

Nobody knows how the slip happened, but somehow John A. Monahan, or rather the number assigned to him, was entered on the books for 25 years instead of five years. Upon being defrosted, and discovering that a quarter of a century had elapsed, his rage was awesome. Along with everything else, his love for his sweetheart had been perfectly preserved, but she had given up waiting for him and was a happy mother of two boys and six girls.

Monahan's accusation that the Zeritskys had "ruined his life" may be taken with a grain of salt. He was still a young man, and the rumor that he received a hundred thousand for the magazine rights to his story was true.

As most readers are aware, what has come to be known as "Zeritsky's Law" was passed by Congress and signed by the President three days after Monahan's story broke.

Seventy-five years after Mrs. Graham's cat fell into the freezer, it became the law of the land that the mandatory penalty for anyone applying quick-freezing methods to any living thing, human or animal, was death. Also, all quick-frozen people were to be defrosted immediately.

Los Angeles papers reported that beginning on the day Monahan's story

appeared, men by the thousands poured into the city. They continued to come, choking every available means of transport, for the next two days--until, that is, Zeritsky's Law went through.

When we consider the date, and remember that due to the gravity of the international situation, a bill had just been passed drafting all men from 16 to 60, we realize why Congress had to act.

The Zeritskys, of course, were among the first to be taken. Because of their experience, they were put in charge of a military warehouse for dehydrated foods, and warned not to get any ideas for a new business.

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Zeritsky's Law, by Ann Griffith

The Protector

BY BETSY CURTIS

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*There's a fortune in a boxer who feels no pain.
This one didn't, except in odd ways....*

How come I live here on Gorlin permanent? Well, it's something like this.

There is nobody real surprised when some scientist writes an article in the Sunday supplement about the primitive tribes of Anestha dying out probably. The Anesthon natives is freaks, anyway, and folks just naturally figure they can't last long in stiff competition. If you are like them and your body don't feel any pain any time, you need a nursemaid around to keep you from doing dumb things, like walking in front of a truck or starving to death.

I am here on Gorlin a couple times and know about 'em. Some folks think it's comical to watch the space crews think up ways to give an Anesthon a workout. I see one Anesthon girl--a real looker she is, too--dance fourteen hours before she gives out, just for a bottle of perfume and one of them Venusian fur lounge robes. They sure enjoy their pleasures, even if they never feel no pain. You feeling any? More thiska?

Hey, Noor! Another round of thiska for the boys!

Well, they can feel your feelings, and any thoughts that are about them, too. I guess all they live for is pleasure and a pat on the back. One time a little runty Anesthon guy even builds a whole stone blockhouse for a first looie, when the looie thinks real hard that the little guy looks like a first-rate hod carrier. Time the house is

built, the Anesthon's hands is all bloody and one ankle broke where a chunk of rock drops on him. He don't notice it, of course.

Pierre gets all worked up about them Anestha dying out. That's my boy Pierre, the heavyweight. I name him Pierre so's nobody thinks he is tough till afterward. He comes from Gorlin. Of course I have to stable him on Venus long enough for a legal residence, or the Boxing Commission would have him investigated and maybe banned from the ring as a telepath. Tough training him, too. He can't see the sense of fighting, but, man, he can stay in the ring all night. He never does get real speedy on his feet, but he learns fast and packs a wicked left. I don't have to lie when I am thinking real hard he is champeen material.

Anyhow, Pierre gets all worked up over his race getting extinct. He has a sister who is glenched to some nice boy and his old man is some sort of a chief. He is all for beating it back by the next via-Venus ship to see what is getting at the old folks at home. I calm him down though, give him a couple of shots of thiska and say I better take him around to see that scientist-dopester and get the inside first. I have to go everywhere with him to see he doesn't break a leg and forget to tell me about it.

* * * * *

So we hop a TAT in Chi and make for Washington where this science fellow is with some Smithsonian Institute. He is nice enough about seeing us, but he can't figure how a Chinaman like Pierre has any call to be steamed up about the Anestha (you seen these Anestha with their slick black hair and goldy skin and smooth eyelids like a Earth Chinaman) so I have to break down and tell him about Pierre being an Anesthon.

That scientist is pretty peeved with me bringing Pierre into the Earth system, but when I tell him Pierre wants to go back to help out the folks, he kind of clams up and says the article is just one of those Sunday paper things. There don't really seem to be anything wrong on Gorlin except that all the workers are getting more careless than usual, falling off walls they are building and getting hit by rocks during blasting, or walking in front of full cars in the mines.

Pierre gives the man a look. "Workers? Mines? Blasting?" he says. "What gives? There are no mines on Gorlin," he says, "just a few quarries and a lot of big farms. We never have to kill ourselves working. What

gives?" he says.

"Oh," the man comes back, "there's a couple big targ mines in full swing. Some big Earth concern is shipping out the stuff five freighters a day to Mercury for mass insulation. All native workers. They don't get paid much--weej cigarettes, bubble bath, some thiska, electro-fur blankets, stuff like that--but I don't hear yapping. If I do, I report anything that looks like slavery." Of course he says it with a lot of grammar and it takes him a half hour, but that is the slant.

He wants to gab some then with Pierre. I see that the boy is getting jittery and homesick, too, when the guy starts raving about swimming in the flaff pools and the feeling of katweela petals under your bare feet, so I says we have to catch a plane and get out of there.

Pierre still wants to head for Gorlin. He says his people must be unhappy about something or they are more careful. Life on Gorlin is too much fun to just go and die for no reason.

I try to pep him up on the way back to Chi, talking about his next fight with Kid Bop, but he says he can't see any reason in fighting, either, just now. I tell him I think he kind of likes fighting, but he says what he likes is the nice things I think about him when he wins, and he is too worried about his family to pay much attention to what I think just now.

* * * * *

Well, we are both pretty flush from one of the best fight seasons I ever see and a rest won't hurt the boy, so I say okay, we are going by the first liner off the Flats.

"You don't have to go, Joe," he says. "Keep your dough and train a couple more kids. I may not be back," he says.

"Look, boy," I says, "you know what the food is like on them liners," I says, kind of kidding, "and if there's nobody around to cram it down you, you don't eat, and if you don't eat, you starve--and if you starve, you are in no condition to cheer up your sister and your old man. Besides," I says, "I can afford a vacation and you're the only fighter I want to work with. You've got a real future," I says, "and I'm going to bring you back alive."

I guess that makes him feel kind of good, because he grins first time

since he reads that paper and says, "All right, Joe, come on along."

* * * * *

We buy a few pretties and neckties in the station and ship out of Chi for the Flats on the next TAT. Pierre wants to get some perfume for his sister, but I tell him we can get better on Venus, where all the good stuff is made.

The trip from Venus Space Base to Gorlin is fast on account of over-drive, but even so I have no trouble passing Pierre off as a fighter who has the jitters and is headed for a vacation where he learns to take it easy the easy way. He is always burning his fingers or his mouth on a cigarette, and I have to keep an eye on him all the time. Nerves, I explain to the passengers.

When we land, Pierre is all for hunting up his folks, but I says no, if there is some trouble, it is smarter to case the joint. We check in at the swanky tourist hotel. She is new since I am on Gorlin a couple years ago and what class! She is built around one of the biggest flaff pools on the whole planet and our room is completely lined with padded velvety stuff, sort of a deep red color, and the bathroom has a cloudrift shower that you nearly float away on.

But Pierre just doesn't relax. I keep trying to make him get in the shower, but it is no use. He says he is just too worried to take any pleasure in it. I don't think we ought to go scouting till night and that is thirty some hours yet, but when I see he is settling down to wear the fuzz right off the floor walking round and round, I give in, feed him a sandwich I bring from the ship, and we stroll off in the woods like we are looking for flowers.

There are no signs around the hotel saying which way to the mines, so we set off to circle the hotel and spaceport clearing to look for the rail-line that brings the targ to the port. I figure we have gone about two-thirds of the way around when I nearly fall over a guy sitting on the ground with his head in his hands. What I think is katweela flowers is just the red Anesthon kloa he has on. He looks up sort of dull and then he sees Pierre with me. He lets out a yip and sits back hard on the ground and moans. Pierre yanks the fellow up on his feet and hugs him and starts to jabber away so fast I can't tell what he is saying. Foreigners always talk faster than anybody else. The other guy puts in a word or two every once in a while and then he scrams off through the trees.

"That's Noor," Pierre informs me, "the guy my sister Jennel is glenched to. He's gonna get us a couple of kloas so nobody'll notice us around the mine. He's feeling mighty low, but I can't figure out why. He says Jennel and the old man are okay, only he can't ever carry Jennel to his own house because he ain't man enough. I don't get it. He can make a good fighter, Joe."

* * * * *

Before you can count three, Noor is back again with the kloas and Pierre strips and gets into his. I ain't too keen to show my shapelies, but Pierre starts grabbing my shirt and I have to put the kloa on or else. The boys head south at a good clip and I tag along trying to catch up and find out the score. When Pierre sees I am making like winded, he slows down and tells me we are going to the mine owner's fancy dump about two miles down the drag. Pierre says Noor tells him the mine owner doesn't like him and he has to leave us when we get in sight of the house.

After about a mile, Noor begins to drag along. Then he just sits down under another tree and says that is the end of the line for him. He points through the trees and says go on, maybe he is still there when we come back, maybe not. While Pierre is jawing with him, I look up the trail and see a Anesthon babe about a hundred feet away. You can tell it is a babe from one of them blue and green mollos draped around her over the kloa.

Noor sees her, too, and takes off like a bat back the way we come. Pierre jogs ahead and when I get up with him, there he is hugging and jabbering again.

"My sister Jennel," he says, and, "Jennel, this is Joe, my manager."

She is a cute trick with lots of yumph showing through the mollo. She stands kind of slumped, though, and a few of the flowers in her shiny black hair are pretty mashed.

"Smatter, Jennel?" I says. "You look kind of dragged out for a dame whose brother comes home practically a champeen. Katweela flowers go on strike?" I says, just trying to make talk.

She slumps a little more and says the boss don't like her and how it's too bad her brother has to come home and find her still alive and

cluttering up the woods.

I tell Pierre she better take us to this boss that don't like a babe like her, but she just shakes her head and says go that way and we come to the house. Then she says the boss makes the natives use the employees' entrance on the other side of the house and she offers to take and show us the way. She kind of twitches when she says "natives."

She don't even says yes or no all the way to the gate till, just before we get there, I trip on a root and bang my knee on a rock on the way down. Well, I howl and cuss some and she comes up close and asks me what seems to be the matter. I tell her the blamed rock hurts my knee and I think real hard about how her knee would feel if a rock hits it and she busts right out crying.

"Oh, you poor man, you poor man, you," she sobs. "That rock don't like you at all."

"It don't hate me, either," I says. "It's only a rock."

"But it makes a hurt to you. It don't love you and now you are not happy where there's any rocks because they don't love you," she says, and she helps me up and starts dragging me along, still crying like crazy.

* * * * *

I don't make nothing out of that, but pretty soon we come to a little gate in a thick row of bushes. Jennel lets go of me then and says she hopes Pierre is a strong man and a good worker and that the boss likes him. And then she gives a big sigh and says if the boss don't like him, we can find her over there where the men are cutting down a bunch of trees, because if one of the trees likes her, it will maybe fall on her pretty soon.

Pierre tells her to wait right there by the gate because he is coming back. He isn't looking for work so the boss won't care if he is strong or not. She just sighs again and sits down on the grass and whimpers.

Pierre tries once more to get her to tell him what is the matter, but all she says is that their father and some other fellow named Frith are up at the big house. They are being talked to by the boss about not getting out enough targ on the shifts where they are foremen, and she says how sad it is about Pierre coming home.

It is just beginning to filter through my thick skull that the boss is connected with all this dying out of the Anestha, as the Sunday paper puts it, and I grab Pierre away from Jennel and hustle him through the gate.

"Look, Pierre," I says, "we'll go around and listen by them long windows and see what cooks. I'll bet that boss is up to something dirty in there. If he is the one who messed up Jennel," I says, "we better just mess him up some."

There is nobody in sight on the lawn and we just march up to the window easy as pie. There is this big booming voice giving somebody what for.

"You poor miserable idiots," yells this voice, "you can't keep the workers off the tracks and you get out less than twenty tons of targ since last night, and then you waste a whole charge of nitro by not telling the watchman he's not supposed to smoke in the enclosure. All those people are dead and it's your fault."

I hear a snuffle behind me and when I turn around, there is Jennel. She has sneaked up behind us to see what we are going to do.

"That's how he talks to me, too," she lets us know in a whisper, "only he says I am not fit to even wash dishes, let alone ever have a house of my own ... when I drop one of his plates a little while ago. He says I am looking in a mirror instead of where I am going and he hopes I see what an ugly pan I have, because I ought to know it and keep out of people's way so they won't have to look at me." Her tears splash right down on the grass.

"And that's not all," the yelling inside goes on. "Not only do you kill off all my workers, but at this rate I'm losing money paying you four packs of cigarettes a day. If I have to blast off and start from scratch in some other part of this blamed universe, you stupid, gutless ... why, you aren't even men. You worms don't even run when you see a car coming at you. Too blamed dumb to come in out of the rain."

I stick my head around the corner and look in, and there is the back of a big guy in a Mercury-made suit and with a bald head that is red all the way round to the back of his neck. On the other side of the room I see a couple of the sorriest-looking Anestha God ever makes, shuffling their feet and looking like kicked dogs.

I turn to Pierre. "Go in there swinging," I says, like at a fight, and pull the window open.

"He won't like me," Pierre says, hanging back. "He says Anestha are dumb cowards. Maybe he knows. Maybe I won't dare hit him."

"You get in there and poke him, boy," I says and give him a push. "I like you and I see you fight and the Anestha got more guts than anybody!"

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The big guy hears us and turns around. "Get out of here, you mangy natives," he bellows. "You good for nothing, shivering, sniveling, cowardly boobs. I'm not ready for you yet." He is shaking a whippy-looking cane at me and Pierre, and I think he has turned purple.

"We're ready for you, though," I yell back. I climb into the room pulling Pierre in after me. "Pierre's no sniveling coward and you can quit talking to his brave, heroic, self-sacrificing father like that. Put 'em up and defend yourself, you howling ape," I yell, "because Pierre is going to give you the beating of your howling life!"

I see Pierre's old man and the other fellow spruce up some.

The big guy sits down in a chair real quick, and, sucking in a big breath, he starts going all fatherly at Pierre, telling him that he doesn't want to have to hit him back, because Pierre will not feel it when he kills him, which he doesn't want to have to do because Pierre is just a poor weak Anesthon who don't know from nothing, and he doesn't want to injure any of his workers and he is just telling Pierre's old man a few things to protect the Anestha.

Pierre looks at me kind of doubtful.

"Go on, hit the fat bully," I says, real icy. "He has it coming. You owe it to your old man and Noor and Jennel here. Go ahead and show him what kind of champeens the Anestha can turn out. It's just for his own good," I says, "so hit him now. Then you can tell your dad what a great guy you are."

Pierre's left obediently swings into the lug's jaw with a crack like a rifle. He don't even watch the big guy sag down on the floor. He begins hugging his father and the other fellow and grinning and jabbering away

like blue blazes.

The big guy is still breathing, but out cold, so I go to look for a tele-viz. I figure the authorities better hear my story before the big guy wakes up.

After I make my spiel, the port chief says to come in and bring Pierre and his father and Frith and Jennel and Noor, too, if we can find him, and make an official recorded report. He is sending a doctor out by 'copter.

We beat it for the port, leaving the fat boss sleeping on the floor.

We all stay in protective custody at the hotel, swimming in flaff and lounging around the thiska bar for a couple of weeks, until the commission headed by that scientist from the Smithsonian Institute comes out and takes the boss back to Earth. He has to see a judge about why he should not go into stir for a while for psychological coercion or something like that.

Before they leave, the commission hands me an official charge at a hundred thou a year to stay as Protector of Morale to the Anestha. That is better than the fight racket, but the protectorship is a laugh. I can't even go out for a walk without a couple dozen Anestha tagging along, to keep me from stubbing my toe on some unfriendly pebble, or socking my eye on some unloving devil of a doorknob.

Bimmie Says

By SYDNEY VAN SCYOC

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*Bimmie says people are stupid. Bimmie says he can help
them--but they're not really worth his trouble, Bimmie says.*

June 27, 1982 Bimmie said to do this, keep a diary. I said, Cows? He
said, You deaf, woman? A book! Then I remembered, only I haven't seen
one. It's for when he's famous. Then we can have it published anytime
we need money.

I'd better tell about us. I'm short, sort of cute, and I cook good.
Bimmie's tall and skinny, he likes to eat. He's 18, I'm 16. We got
married 22 days ago. Instead of a fancy wedding, Bimmie told my folks,
Give us money.

He needed the money for his laboratory. It's in the basement. It's
what'll make him famous.

* * * * *

June 31, 1982 We got a cat and dog. They're black and two months old.
I wanted red collars. Bimmie said, Don't waste my money, woman.

Bimmie wanted them down in his laboratory. He said that'd be proper
conditions. I said, No, I'll leave if you do and you'll have to eat
capsules.

The cat's he, the dog's she. Bimmie doesn't want them outside, ever.

* * * * *

July 3, 1982 We thought Bimmie's folks'd change their minds. But they
said, Finally and conclusively, we won't. Bimmie says he doesn't want
to go to college if they're stingy because we got married. He already
knows everything important.

He wants me to finish school. I can finish in December. I thought when you got married you didn't have to, just slept late and fixed your hair.

* * * * *

July 9, 1982 The puppy's Susta, the cat's Sup. Susta's jealous because Sup jumps on the couch, and she can't.

Bimmie'll have to make pills for Susta. She hides from his needle. She'll be small. That's good, Bimmie says.

* * * * *

August 17, 1982 He just married me to cook! Every night he's in his laboratory. I'm always in this stupid, _ugly_ house.

* * * * *

August 18, 1982 Susta won't change for a long time. Bimmie has pills now.

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September 1, 1982 School started. Frankie's still stuck on me. He says I'm sexy, that's why Bimmie married me. I said, He married me for my cooking. He laughed.

* * * * *

September 11, 1982 I felt funny again. I stopped by Momma's. She bets she knows what it is. She knew after ten days.

* * * * *

September 15, 1982 I had to ask the school nurse if it was that. She said, Yes, two weeks. I hope she's wrong. Babies are work. She said, But the fulfillment. I said, Changing sippy diapers is what you call fulfillment?

It doesn't show. Frankie winked at me.

* * * * *

September 17, 1982 The cat climbed those lace curtains Bimmie's mother gave us. Bimmie said it was my job to watch him. I said, That's a stupid way to spend my life. He said, I didn't marry you to have you sit around and do nothing.

Susta watched Sup and whined. She wants to be a cat.

* * * * *

September 27, 1982 Bimmie read my diary. He said there wasn't a June 31. He says to tell more about his work. It won't make money if he's not in it.

I told him about the baby. He said, Whoopee! He got some obstetrics books.

* * * * *

October 5, 1982 Bimmie expects the baby to kick already. I'm glad it doesn't! He made the puppy's pills tonight.

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October 7, 1982 I let them outside. The smell in the house turns my stomach. I'm afraid to take the pills Bimmie made me.

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October 9, 1982 I let them out again. There's a black dog next door with a long nose, ears like rosebuds and white feet. Susta was scared. Sup hissed.

* * * * *

October 25, 1982 Bimmie's so nice. He took me to a tridiversion. He hates them. He said, They're for the cloddy-minded masses. I said, Well, what are we?

I want a tridiversion wall. Bimmie says, No. We had a fight.

* * * * *

October 30, 1982 I took a pill Bimmie made. I felt good.

I let them out. It beats cleaning up. Susta played with that dog.

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November 7, 1982 I went to Dr. Brantly. He hypnotized me. I don't remember it.

* * * * *

December 13, 1982 Susta's leaving spots. I thought, She's hurt. Bimmie explained and said, Don't let her out. He wants to wait till next time to have puppies. He said, The treatment must take full effect first. He explained but I didn't understand.

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January 5, 1983 I'm out of school. It's boring. Momma says I'm too young to settle down. She's crazy. I'm sixteen.

* * * * *

January 11, 1983 Bimmie's reading more obstetrics books. Hypnotism too. He tried to hypnotize me, but I went to sleep.

* * * * *

January 14, 1983 I wish Momma would stop. She said, Where're you going to put a baby, with only one bedroom. She cried and called me Baby. Gosh! She said, You shouldn't have cats around babies, you'll have to give him away.

Bimmie heard, from the bedroom. He came out. He said, I am conducting an important scientific experiment with the cat and dog. I would as soon give away the baby. Momma got white under her plasti-skin. She said, Bimmie, you're a monster for experimenting on dumb animals. And for rejecting your own child.

Then Sup climbed the curtains Momma gave us. She shrieked, You're ungrateful! and huffed out.

She came back later, asking us to forgive her. She said she wanted to help, since we're both still children. Well!

I do wonder where we'll put the baby. Maybe on the couch.

* * * * *

February 17, 1983 I had to tell Bimmie I was letting them out. Sup fought with the dog next door. Bimmie got mad. He told me, They must have a controlled environment. I said, It's hard for me to bend over to clean up. Finally he said he'd clean up and wasn't it funny Sup and that dog knew they were rivals.

I didn't know myself.

* * * * *

March 17, 1983 I saw Dr. Brantly today. He says I'm fine. I tried to remember him putting me in the trance, but I couldn't.

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April 19, 1983 Saw Dr. Brantly. Sup pulled the curtains down. Susta isn't jealous any more, she's playing with a string.

* * * * *

May 9, 1983 I'm writing this next day. Last night I had this sharp pain. I said, Bimmie, call Dr. Brantly. I remember him looking at me funny. That's all I remember until I woke up in the hospital. Bimmie was sitting beside me, looking proud. I asked him, What's happened? He grinned. We have a nine-pound son, he said. I named him after the man who delivered him. I said, Did I faint? That wasn't the way it was explained, just that Dr. Brantly would put me in a trance. Bimmie was too busy grinning to say, then he had to go to work. The doctor came in. I said, It wasn't bad, I only felt one pain. He frowned. I said, Can I see the baby? He said, Later. He went out too.

I thought I must have cussed.

I didn't understand until the nurse brought the baby. He had a little plastic bracelet that said Bimford Fost, Jr. He was red and squalling. I felt like doing the same, because I knew why Bimmie had been studying those obstetrics books. He has to try everything!

* * * * *

May 21, 1983 I'm seventeen today. Bimmie says to write more. He

thinks that's all I have to do. The baby sleeps all the time he isn't crying. I like him, only I'm tired of diapers.

Susta gets three pills every day. She plays with them, then eats them. Bimmie said last night, It won't be long until my experiment bears fruit. He said to write that here.

* * * * *

June 3, 1983 Susta tried to climb the curtains.

* * * * *

June 5, 1983 Bimmie wanted to give the baby some pills he made. I said, No. He said, They'll make him smarter, woman. I said, He's enough trouble dumb.

Today was our first anniversary. Bimmie wouldn't buy me anything.

* * * * *

June 9, 1983 We fought about a dryer. After he left I said, For that I'll let your animals out. The dog next door came up. Susta arched her back.

* * * * *

June 21, 1983 I've been putting them out every day.

* * * * *

June 25, 1983 Bimmie says to write every day, his experiment is coming to a head. I can't see anything happening. Susta gets six pills now.

* * * * *

June 27, 1983 The dog's that way again. Bimmie said, At last my experiment shall be carried to completion. Not that I care for fame and riches, no, I care only for the accomplishment of something man has never before achieved. I said he didn't sound natural. He said, Put it down that way, woman.

* * * * *

June 29, 1983 Bimmie wanted to feed the baby. I caught him before he gave him a pill. We fought. He said, Who delivered him? I said, I made him, and pointed to my stomach. I said, I won't have you using him like a guinea pig.

* * * * *

July 4, 1983 Bimmie says tomorrow we'll shut them up in the basement.

* * * * *

July 5, 1983 The funniest thing. Bimmie said, You put them in the basement. Then he left. I thought, I'll just take them out while I hang diapers. But when we went out, three dogs came up. I said, Scat! I couldn't chase them because I had my arms full of diapers, because Bimmie won't buy me a basket. They came closer, edging around. I stomped my feet and yelled. The dog next door came and growled. Then Sup hissed at him. This was the first the other three saw Sup. He hunched up, spitting and intending to chase them off. Only they took out after him instead. He ran off with four dogs after him. I couldn't do anything, my arms were full.

* * * * *

July 6, 1983 Bimmie didn't think it was funny. He yelled, What are you, stupid? Didn't you know dogs would come around? Didn't you know dogs chase cats? He took the car and called, Kitty, kitty, all over town. No luck. I said, Get another cat. He said, This one is used to Susta. I said, There'll be another time. He stared at me and said Susta's system would tolerate only so much of the stuff he's been giving her. He can't give her any more after next month. He'll have to wait another year. Then he went looking again.

That was last night. Maybe he'll come home tonight.

* * * * *

July 7, 1983 He hasn't. Bimmie's biting his fingernails. He'd bite harder if he knew what happened today.

I thought Susta was asleep when I went to hang diapers. I had my arms clear full. When I opened the door, Susta shot past me. I yelled at her, but she went flying down the street, and I saw that dog next door

take off behind her. I thought first thing, It's Bimmie's fault for not buying a dryer.

I hung the clothes fast. After all, nothing could happen in such a short time. Then I started up the street calling, Here Susta! But the baby was alone, I had to hurry home.

She came back in half an hour. I didn't tell Bimmie yet.

* * * * *

July 8, 1983 I didn't tell him, still. He was mad because he had to pay to get Sup out of the pound. Bimmie salved his ears, they were torn, and put them in the basement. He said, Now!

* * * * *

July 15, 1983 Bimmie says to write every day. It's dull, them in the basement. They come up tomorrow.

* * * * *

July 23, 1983 Susta acts funnier than ever. She rubs my legs when I'm cooking. She keeps wetting her paws and rubbing her face.

* * * * *

August 3, 1983 Today I caught Susta sharpening her claws on the couch. I said, Bimmie, look at the crazy dog, thinks she's a cat. He frowned. He only has one pimple now, he's kind of handsome. I said, Isn't it cute? Bimmie went downstairs. I think he was worried.

* * * * *

August 11, 1983 Susta's getting big. I let her sleep with the baby. Bimmie says, Whoopee! It worked! I'm scared to tell him now.

* * * * *

August 12, 1983 Susta rubs my leg when she's hungry. Then she sits and switches her tail for a long time.

* * * * *

August 17, 1983 Susta meowed today. I was fixing dinner. She looked up and said, Meow. It wasn't supposed to be this way. Bimmie's afraid she'll have kittens. That isn't what he's trying to do.

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September 5, 1983 Susta wanted to go down in the basement this afternoon. When I called her for supper she came up with her stomach flat. Bimmie and I went down. Susta ducked back in a hole in the wall. There's a sort of little cave. We said, They must be in there. We got a flash, and we could see little black balls. Bimmie couldn't reach them.

Bimmie kept talking about how his experiment is going to revolutionize agriculture.

* * * * *

September 6, 1983 I can hear her meowing to them. We can see them with the flash. We can't tell anything yet.

* * * * *

September 7, 1983 He'll buy a typewriter but not a dryer! He's going to write a book about his experiment. He expects _me_ to type it.

* * * * *

September 10, 1983 She still won't bring them out. She purred today, rusty-like. Bimmie says, sometimes, It had to work. Other times he bites his nails.

He gave me ten pages to type. I thought I'd better.

* * * * *

September 13, 1983 I went down to call Susta and I saw them. There were five, wobbling everywhere. They're the cutest fat things. I picked one up, and then I felt sick. He had a long nose and little rosebud ears and white feet. He looked like the dog next door.

All of them do. They're all puppies. Nothing else, just puppies.

I put them in a box, and took them upstairs.

Bimmie's working tonight. I'll go to bed before he comes home.

* * * * *

September 14, 1983 He raved all morning and tromped around. I said, Shut up or I'll leave and you'll have to eat capsules. He said, I could eat dog food! Then he wanted to see my diary. I said, No. But he yanked out all the drawers and found it.

I took the baby and went to Momma's.

It was suppertime when I came home. He was on the couch with Sup and Susta and the puppies.

He didn't act mad, just nasty-nice. So you came home, he said. I never realized how limited you were, Listie. Your diary's shown me a lot. Can you at least find homes for the puppies?

I said, I guess. I put the baby down. He hadn't thrown anything or burned my diary.

He said, Good, then. I've fixed supper.

He had hamburger, frozen pie and hot chocolate. Some of it tasted bad. I didn't say anything.

* * * * *

September 15, 1983 I asked Bimmie, Should I quit my diary? He said, Yes. Then, No, keep on. I asked, was he doing another experiment? He said, Not yet. I said, Bim better not start talking early. He said, You don't think I'd experiment with my own child? I didn't know. He said, Bim might be smart anyway. I said, He might be, he's your son. It was a good compliment.

* * * * *

September 17, 1983 Bimmie wants to learn cooking. He said, You have to work hard, hanging diapers. It will help if I can cook.

I'll teach him hot chocolate first. His fixing tastes _awful_.

* * * * *

October 5, 1983 I have little to report. Bimford, Jr. is flourishing. The puppies are adorable. Susta and Sup tend them jointly.

Bimmie has no new project. He has thrown all his energies into cooking. He does quite well, except for hot chocolate, which still tastes of chemicals.

I never, until yesterday, realized the intellectual and sensual joy to be derived from delving into Greek drama.

* * * * *

November 9, 1983 Bimford, Jr. is six months old today. Since I gave up the last puppy, the house seems barnlike in its emptiness. I mentioned the fact to Bimford.

His glance was speculative. "I have some money saved. Want a tridiversion wall?"

I was horrified. "Whatever for?"

He shrugged. "Maybe you'd like to go to the library. Get something to read."

I considered. "Perhaps I will," I said. "There isn't much for me to do, hang diapers and push buttons. Automation has almost completely eliminated the housewife's traditional chores."

I left Bimford, Jr. with Mother and walked to the library. I asked the librarian to show me about.

"What are you interested in?" she inquired.

"I don't know," I replied. "Do you have any good recent works on chemistry or perhaps nuclear physics?"

She raised her eyebrows but conducted me to the proper shelf. After finding several interesting volumes, I also checked out a volume on cookery for Bimford. His hot chocolate doesn't improve, despite nightly practice.

He tells me he is working on a new project.

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Bimmie Says, by Sydney Van Scyoc

NOT FIT FOR CHILDREN

By EVELYN E. SMITH

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Galaxy Science Fiction May 1953.

Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

*Trading with the natives was like taking candy
from a kid--but which were the natives?*

Ppon lowered himself hastily to the orlop and ran toward me. "Hurry up, Qan!" he projected on a sub-level, trying to escape my mother's consciousness. "They're coming! All the others are up already."

"Who's coming?" my mother wanted to know, but her full interest was absorbed by her work, and she gave us only the side of her mind. "You youngsters really must learn to think clearly."

"Yes'm." Ppon projected suitable youthful embarrassment, but on a lower level he was giggling. Later I must give him another warning; we young ones could not yet separate the thought channels efficiently, so it was more expedient not to try.

"The _zkuchi_ are coming," I lied glibly, knowing that the old ones accept inanity as merely a sign of immaturity, "on hundreds of golden wings that beat faster than light."

Grandfather removed a part of his mind from his beloved work. "The _zkuchi_ are purely mythological creatures," he thought crossly. "You're old enough to know better than that.... Qana," he appealed to my mother, "why do you let him believe in such nonsense?"

"The _zkuchi_ are part of our cultural heritage, Father," she projected gently. "We must not let the young ones forget our heritage. Particularly if we are to be here for some time."

"It seems to me you're unnecessarily pessimistic," he complained. "You know I've never failed you yet. We shall get back, I promise you. It's just that the transmutation takes time."

"But it's taken such a long time already," she thought sadly.
"Sometimes I begin to have doubts." Then she apparently remembered that serious matters should not be discussed before us young ones. As if we didn't know what was going on. "Run along and play, children," she advised, "but don't forget to check the atmosphere first."

Grandfather started to excogitate something about how it would be better if Ppon went and helped his father while I stayed and did my lessons--you never seem to escape from lessons anywhere in the Universe--but we got away before he could finish.

* * * * *

Topside, the others were jumping up and down in their excitement. Ztul, the half-wit, was so upset he actually spoke: "Hurry, Qan, the tourists are coming!"

"Ztul, you must never, never make words aloud!" I thought fiercely.
"The old ones might hear and find out about the game."

"It's a harmless game," Ppon contributed. "And useful, too. Your grandfather needs the stuff."

"Yes," I agreed, "but perhaps the old ones wouldn't see it that way. They might even stop the game. Adults have funny ideas, and there's no use asking for trouble."

There was a chorus of assenting thought from the others. All of us had our family troubles.

We got to work. Quickly we arranged the interiors of the shelters which we had cleverly built out of materials borrowed from below when the old ones' perceptions were directed elsewhere. The essential structure of the materials had not been changed and could easily be replaced when the time came, but there was no use having to give involved explanations. The old ones never seemed to understand anything.

At first we had just built the shelters as play huts, but when the first tourists had misunderstood, we had improved upon the original misconception. Now we had a regular street full of rude dwellings. Lucky for us the old ones never came topside.

As the little spaceship landed, Ppon and I and four of the others were ready at its door to form a welcoming committee. The rest dispersed to

play villagers. The others took turns alternating the two roles, but I, of course, was always leader. After all, I'd made up the game.

Two members of the crew dropped lightly out of the ship and slid a ramp into place. Then the passengers--there was a sizable group this time, I noted with satisfaction--came, followed by Sam, the guide, a grizzled old human. He grinned at us. We were old friends, for he'd been leading these tours for ten of their Earth years.

The passengers stopped at the foot of the ramp and Sam ran forward to face them. By now we were used to the appearance of the human beings--small, binocular, with smooth, pasty skins--although they had really frightened us when we first laid eyes on them.

* * * * *

"Now, you see, folks," Sam bellowed through his megaphone, "the scientists don't know everything. They said life could not exist out here in the Asteroid Belt--and, behold, life! They said these little planets were too small, had too little gravity to hold an atmosphere. But you just breathe in that air, as pure and fresh and clean as the atmosphere of our own Earth! Speaking of gravity, you'll notice that we're walking, not floating. Matter of fact, you'll notice it's even a little hard to walk; you seem a bit heavier than at home. And they said there would be hardly any gravity. No, folks, those scientists know a lot of things, I won't deny that, but they sure don't know everything."

"Amazing!" a small, bespectacled male passenger said. "I can hardly believe my own senses!"

"Watch out for him," Ppon projected to me. "I think he's a scientist of some kind."

"Don't teach your ancestor to levitate," I conceptualized back.

Of course what struck the passengers first was neither the atmosphere nor the gravity; it was us. They never failed to be surprised, although the travel folders should have shown them what to expect. One of the folders had a picture of me, amusingly crude and two-dimensional, it's true, but not entirely unflattering. I'm not really purple, just a sort of tender fuchsia, but what could you expect from the rudimentary color processes they used? Sam had let me have the original and I always wished I could show it to Mother, but I couldn't without having to explain where it had come from.

"They're so cute!" a thin female screamed. "Almost like big squirrels, really, except for all those arms." Her teeth protruded more than those of the small rodent she was thinking about, or than mine, for that matter.

"Be careful, ma'am," the guide warned her. "They speak English."

"They do? How clever of them. Why, they must be quite intelligent, then."

"They are of a pretty high order of intelligence," the guide agreed, "although their methods of reasoning have always baffled scientists. Somehow they seem to _sense_ scientists, think of them as their enemies, and just clam up entirely."

"I think they're just simply too cute," she said, gazing at me fondly.

"Ah, _srrk_ yourself, madam," I excogitated, confident that humans were non-telepathic.

* * * * *

She looked a little disturbed, though; I'd better watch myself. After all, as leader I had to set a good example.

"This here is Qan," the guide introduced me. "Headman or chief or something of the tribe. He is always on hand to greet us."

"Welcome, travelers from a distant star," I intoned, wrapping my mother's second-best cloak more impressively about me, "to the humble land of the _Gchi_. Come in peace, go in peace."

"Why, he speaks excellent English," the scientist exclaimed.

"They pick up things very fast," Sam explained.

"Natives can be very, very shrewd," a stout female commented, clutching her handbag tightly.

"And now," Sam said, "we will visit the rude dwellings of this simple, primitive, but hospitable people."

"_People!_" Ppon projected. "You better mind your language, Buster!"

People, indeed!"

"Our friend Qan will lead the way." Sam waved toward me.

I smiled back at him, but didn't move.

"Whatsa matter?" he hissed. "Don't you trust me? Your old pal Sam?"

"No," I whispered back. "Last time I let you pay me at the end of the tour, the take was \$3.75 short."

He tried another tack. "But look, Qan, it's a hell of a job getting all those coins together. Why can't you take paper money instead?"

"What good would paper money do me up here?"

"What I can't figure out is what good the metal does you up here, either."

I beamed. "We eat it."

Muttering to himself, he walked over to the ship and called one of the crewmen. They dragged a bag out of the ship's hold. Puffing, they laid it at my feet. I tossed it to Ztul.

"Count it," I ordered out loud, "and if there's any missing, no one leaves this planet alive." I snarled ferociously.

Everybody laughed. It was part of the act.

"You will notice," Sam announced as we led the way down the street, "that the _Gchi_ are all about the same size. No young ones among them. We don't know whether this is because they reproduce differently from us, or because they have concealed their offspring."

"The children must be dear little creatures," the toothy female gushed. "If even the adults are cute when they're seven or eight feet tall, the little ones must be simply precious.... Tell me, Chief, do you have any children?"

"Don't understand," I grunted. "Concept unfamiliar. Not know what children is."

"Funny," remarked the scientist, "he was speaking perfectly good

English before."

"Watch yourself, kid," Ppon ideated warningly to me.

"Children are ..." she began and stopped. "They're--well, how do you reproduce?"

* * * * *

Ppon, the _oosh_-head, took it upon himself to answer. "If you'll just step into my hut, madam, I'll be delighted to show you."

"If you ask me," the scientist stated, "these are frauds."

"Whaddya mean frauds?" Sam demanded indignantly.

"Human beings dressed up as extraterrestrials. They speak too good an English. Their concepts are too much like ours. Their sense of humor is equally vul--too similar."

"You and your big mouth!" I projected to Ppon.

"Look who's thinking!" he excogitated back. I could see I'd have to give him a mind-lashing later.

It was up to me to save the situation. "If you would like to examine me more closely, sir," I addressed the scientist, "you will see that I am not a human being."

He approached me dubiously.

"Closer," I said, looking him in the eye, as I bared my teeth and growled. "I have five eyes, sir, and you will notice that I am looking at you with each one of them. I have seven arms, sir--" here I reached out to grab him "--and you will notice that they are all living tissue."

"No, you couldn't be a human being," he agreed, backing away as soon as I released my grip, "but the whole thing is ... odd. Very odd."

"If anthropologists on Earth can't explain all the customs of the primitives there," Sam tried to placate him, "how can we explain the behavior of extraterrestrials? Let's go into some of the houses. The chief has kindly given us his permission to look around."

"Our houses are your houses," I stated, bowing graciously.

As always, the tourists grew extremely enthusiastic about the furniture in our simple dwellings. "What lovely--er--things you have," squirrel-tooth commented. "What are they used for?"

"Well, the _pryu_ is for the _mrach_, of course," I explained glibly, "and the _wroov_ is much used for _cvrking_ the _budz_, although the _ywrl_ is preferred by the less discriminating.

"Oh," she said. "How I should love to have one of the--'_wroov_' I think it was you said, for my very own. I wonder whether...."

By a curious coincidence, Hsoj arrived at this point, carrying a tray full of things and stuff.

"Artifacts!" he shouted. "Nice artifacts! Who wants to buy artifacts?"

* * * * *

All the tourists did. They were pretty good artifacts, if I do say so myself. I'd made them out of the junk I rescued from our dustbins before the disintegration unit got to work. Honestly, I can't understand how the old ones can complain about our being wasteful and then go and throw away all sorts of perfectly useful things.

"You must pay the natives in metal," the guide explained. "They accept only coins."

"Why?" the stout female wanted to know. "Do they really eat metal?"

"I doubt it. One of them ate a couple of pounds of Earth candy a tourist gave him last time and he seemed to enjoy it without ill effects."

"Without ill effects!" Ppon excogitated. "You should have seen Ztul afterward, boy!"

"Look, Mac." A short fat human offered Hsoj a small silver coin and then five larger brown ones. "Which would you rather have?"

"Them." Hsoj pointed unhesitatingly to the brown coins.

A smile rippled covertly through the tourists.

"They're a simple and child-like people, but really so good-natured," Sam footnoted.

All of us gave simple good-natured smiles as Hsoj accepted the gift of the brown coins.

"Keep up the good work," I projected. "We can use all the copper we can get."

"You like metal, dear?" a female asked Hsoj. She unfastened a belt from around her waist. "Would you take this in exchange for some of your pretty things?"

"Say 'yes,'" I conceptualized. "That's steel. Old and worthless to her, but not to us."

"I know, I know," Hsoj ideated impatiently. "What makes you think you're the only one who knows anything?"

Never had we got such a big haul before, because everybody seemed to have all sorts of metal stuff on him that he valued less than coins.

Now came the sad part of the spiel. "Remember, folks, these simple, honest individuals you see before you are but the scanty remnants of a once-proud race who spanned the skies. For their ancestors must have been godlike indeed to have erected such edifices as that commanding structure over there." Sam pointed to the portable atmosphere machine which was set up several _yebil_ away to give our playground proper air. "Once glorious, now fallen into ruin and decay."

"You're going to catch _muh_ from the old ones," Ppon ideated, "when they find out you haven't been keeping the machine clean."

"Don't be a silly _oosh_," I thought back with a mental grin. "I'm using the atmosphere machine to create atmosphere."

"You're getting to be as stupid as a human," he thought in disgust.

"May we go inside?" the scientific passenger asked Sam.

"No, indeed," I said hastily. "It is our temple, sacred to the gods. No unbeliever may set foot in it."

"What are the basic tenets of your religion?" the scientist wanted to know.

"We do not talk about it," I said with dignity. "It is tabu. Bad form."

* * * * *

"And now," announced the guide, glancing at his watch, "we have just time for the war dance before we leave for Vesta."

"Against whom are they planning a war?" asked a small passenger, turning pale.

"It's a vestigial ritual," Sam explained quickly, "dating back to the days when there were other--er--when there was somebody to fight. Just an invocation to the gods ... general stuff like that ... nothing to be afraid of. Isn't it so, Qan?"

"Quite so," I replied, folding all my arms across my mother's cloak. "Come in peace, go in peace. Our motto."

We started the dance. It wouldn't have got us a passing mark in first grade, where we'd learned it _rffi_ ago, but our version of the dance of the _zkuchi_ was plenty good enough for the tourists.

"If I ever visit Earth, _Janna_ forbid," I thought to Ppon as we executed an intricate caracole, "I'm going to wear earplugs all the time."

The dance finished.

"Now everybody get together!" Sam shouted, clapping his hands to round up his charges. "We are about to leave little _Gchik_."

"He should only know what _gchik_ means," Ppon sniggered mentally.

"Little _Gchik_ is barren, dying, its past glories all but forgotten," Sam almost sobbed, "but still its simple, warm-hearted inhabitants carry on bravely...."

"Couldn't we _do_ something for them?" suggested the stout female.

Everybody murmured assent. This contingency arose all too often--a result of our being just too lovable.

"No one can help us," I said in a deep voice, pulling the cloak over my face. The _idzik_ feathers trimming it tickled like crazy. "We must dree our own weird alone. Besides, the air of _Gchik_ has a deleterious effect upon human beings if they're exposed to it for longer than four hours."

There was a mad scramble to reach the ship.

"Stand by the atmosphere machine, Hsoj," I instructed, "to poison a little air in case anybody wants to take a sample."

The scientist actually did, in a little bottle he seemed to have brought along for the purpose; but he got off the "asteroid" as rapidly as the rest of them, after that.

We watched the spaceship dwindle to a silver mote in the distance.

"Whew," Ppon thought, sinking to the surface. "That war dance sure takes a lot out of a fellow."

* * * * *

Then he conceptualized indignantly as he--as well as the rest of us--floated off the top level. "Somebody's cut the gravity!"

"Must be Grandfather," I mentalized. "I suppose he thinks we've been out long enough, so he's warning us, just as if we were a bunch of infants. I guess we'd better go inside, though. Let's not forget to turn off the atmosphere, fellows. It uses too much energy and the old ones won't let us play topside any more."

"You know everything, don't you, Qan?" Ppon sneered.

I ignored him. "Pretty good haul," I excogitated as I hefted the bags of metal. "Here, Ztul, catch!"

"You always make me carry everything!" he complained.

Grandfather caught us as we lowered ourselves from the airlock. I figured he must have been getting suspicious or otherwise he'd never have left his beloved engines.

"What's this you youngsters have?" he wanted to know, pouncing on

our bags. "Metal, eh? I suppose you were going to make another fake meteorite out of it for me, were you?"

"I thought you wanted metal, Grandfather," I sulked. He could have been more appreciative.

"Certainly I want metal. You know I need it to get the drive working again. But what I want to know is where you got it from. I'd think you stole it, but how could even little _muhli_ like you steal out here in space?"

"They have always brought you metal from time to time, Father," Mother projected, coming out as she overthought us. "So clever of them, I always thought."

"Yes, but I've been thinking that their encountering so many meteorites was a singularly curious coincidence. And they were curious meteorites, too. I suppose the young ones made them themselves."

"But out of what, Father? You know we don't have any spare metal on the ship. That's why you haven't been able to get the repairs finished before. Where else could they get the metal but from meteorites?"

"I don't know where they get their metal from, but certainly not from meteorites. These pieces here are artifacts. Look, the metal has been more or less refined and roughly formed into shapes with crude designs upon them. Tell me the truth, Qan, where did you get these?"

"Some people gave them to us," I replied sullenly.

"People?" asked my mother. "What are people?"

"Natives of this solar system. They call themselves people."

"Nonsense!" my grandfather interjected. "It's just another one of your fantasies. You know what the astronomers say--none of the planets of this little system is capable of supporting life."

"They come from the third planet," I persisted, trying to keep from disgracing myself by _fllwng_ in front of the other young ones. "There is life there. All of us have seen them. Besides, there is the metal."

My companions chorused agreement.

"You see, Father," my mother smiled, stroking my head with three hands, "the wise ones are not always right."

* * * * *

My grandfather nodded his head slowly. "It is not impossible, I suppose. I hope it is true that these--people _gave_ you and your friends the metal, Qan."

"Oh, yes, Grandfather," I thought anxiously. "Of their own free will."

"Well--" he continued, not altogether convinced--"this lot should be enough to repair the engines. Perhaps, when we take off, we should have a look at the youngsters' third planet on the way home."

"But this trip has taken such a long time already, Father," my mother protested. "Almost a _rff_; the young ones have missed nearly two semesters of school. And Qan has been getting some very peculiar ideas--from those _people_, I suppose."

"But if there is some sort of intelligent life," Grandfather thought, "it's our duty to visit it. Next time we need to stop the ship for repairs, it might be more convenient to put in at this third planet instead of just hanging out there in space. And the young ones say the natives seem to be friendly."

"I'd like to see Sam's face when he comes back and finds his 'asteroid' gone," I conceptualized.

"Yes," Ppon agreed, with the edge of his mind, but his main channel was turned in another direction. "That is the end of this game now, you know. In the next game _I_ shall be leader."

"Oh, yes?" I thought back. "I'm the leader and I'm staying leader, because I am the biggest and cleverest."

"Children!" my mother protested, distressed. "I'm afraid you've picked up some really unpleasant concepts from those dreadful natives."

"Come, come, Qana," Grandfather ideated, "we mustn't be intolerant."

"Perhaps not," she replied with heat, "and I know the natives probably don't know any better, but I am not going to have my young one or anyone else's contaminated. Visit the third planet if you wish, but not

this time. You'll have to make a special trip for it. I'm not going to let you stop off there while the young ones are aboard. It's obviously no fit place for children."

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Not Fit for Children, by Evelyn E. Smith

THE LONELY

BY JUDITH MERRIL

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Worlds of Tomorrow October 1963
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

If we practice our "Space Speech" and listen real
hard--Is this the sort of thing we're going to hear?

TO: The Hon. Natarajan Roi Hennessy, Chairman, Committee on
Intercultural Relations, Solar Council, Eros.

FROM: Dr. Shlomo Mouna, Sr. Anthropologist, Project Ozma XII, Pluto
Station.

DATE: 10/9/92, TC.

TRANSMISSION: VIA: Tight beam, scrambled. SENT: 1306 hrs, TST.
RCVD: 1947 hrs, TST

Dear Nat:

Herewith, a much condensed, heavily annotated, and topsecret coded
transcript of a program we just picked up. The official title is
GU#79, and the content pretty well confirms some of our earlier
assumptions about the whole series, as this one concerns us directly,
and we have enough background information, including specific dates, to
get a much more complete and stylistic translation than before.

I'd say the hypotheses that these messages represent a "Galactic
University" lecture series broadcast from somewhere near Galactic
Center, through some medium a damn sight faster than light, now seems
very reasonable.

This one seemed to come from Altair, which would date transmission from
there only a few years after some incidents described in script. Some

of the material also indicates probable nature of original format, and I find it uncomfortable. Also reraises question of whether Altair, Arcturus, Castor, etc., relay stations are aimed at us? Although the content makes that doubtful.

Full transcript, film, etc. will go out through channels, as soon as you let me know which channels. This time I am not pleading for declassification. I think of some Spaserve reactions and--frankly I wonder if it shouldn't be limited to SC Intercult Chairmen and Ozma Sr. Anthropoids--and sometimes I wonder about thee.

Cheery reading.

Shlomo

* * * * *

TRANSCRIPT, GU#79, Condensed Version, edited by SM, 10/9/92, TC. (NRH: All material in parens is in my words--summarizing, commenting, and/or describing visual material where indicated. Straight text is verbatim, though cut as indicated. Times, measurements, etc., have been translated from Standard Galactic or Aldebaran local to Terran Standard; and bear in mind that words like "perceive" are often very rough translations for SG concepts more inclusive than our language provides for.--SM)

* * * * *

(Open with distance shot of Spaserve crew visiting Woman of Earth statue on Aldebaran VI. Closeup of reverent faces. Shots of old L-1, still in orbit, and jump-ship trailing it. Repeats first shot, then to Lecturer. You may have seen this one before. Sort of electric eel type. Actually makes sparks when he's being funny.)

* * * * *

The image you have just perceived is symbolic, in several senses. First, the statue was created by the Arlemites, the native race of Aldebaran VI (!! Yes, Virginia, there are aborigines!!) in an effort to use emotional symbols to bridge the gap in communications between two highly dissimilar species. Second: due to the farcical failure of this original intent, the structure has now become a vitally significant symbol--you perceived the impact--to the other species involved, the Terrans, a newly emerged race from Sol III. (Note that

"you perceived." We must accept the implication that the original broadcasting format provides means of projecting emotional content.) Finally, this two-fold symbol relates in one sense (Shooting sparks like mad here. Professional humor pretty much the same all over, hey?) to the phenomenon of the paradox of absolute universality and infinite variety inherent in the symbolism.

* * * * *

(Next section is a sort of refresher-review of earlier lectures. Subject of the whole course appears to be, roughly, "Problems of disparate symbolism in interspecies communications." This lecture--don't laugh--is "Symbols of Sexuality." Excerpts from review:--)

* * * * *

The phenomenon of symbolism is an integral part of the development of communicating intelligence. Distinctions of biological construction, ecological situation, atmospheric and other geophysical conditions, do of course profoundly influence the racially infantile phases of intellectual-emotional-social development in all cultures ... (but) ... from approximately that point in the linear development of a civilization at which it is likely to make contact with other cultures--that is, from the commencement of cultural maturity, following the typically adolescent outburst of energy in which first contact is generally accomplished ... (He describes this level at some length in terms of a complex of: 1, astrophysical knowledge; 2, control of basic matter-energy conversions, "mechanical or psial;" 3, self-awareness of whole culture and of individuals in it; and 4, some sociological phenomena for which I have no referents.) ... all cultures appear to progress through a known sequence of i-e-s patterns ... (and) ... despite differences in the _rate_ of development, the composite i-e-s curve for mature cultural development of all known species is identical enough to permit reliable predictions for any civilization, once located on the curve.

* * * * *

(Then progresses to symbolism. Specific symbols, he says, vary even more, between cultures, than language or other means of conscious communication, as to wit--)

It is self-evident that the specific symbols utilized by, for instance,

a septasexual, mechanophilic, auriphased species of freely locomotive discrete individuals, will vary greatly from those of, let us say, a mitotic, unicellular, intensely psioid, communal culture. (Which makes it all the more striking, that) it is specifically in the _use of symbols_, the general consciousness of their significance, the degree of sophistication of the popularly recognized symbols, and the uses to which they are put by the society as a whole, that we have found our most useful constant, so far, for purposes of locating a given culture on the curve.

* * * * *

(Much more here about other aspects of cultural development, some of which are cyclical, some linear--all fascinating but not essential to understanding of what follows.)

* * * * *

Sexuality has until recently been such a rare phenomenon among civilized species that we had casually assumed it to be something of a drawback to the development of intelligence. Such sexual races as we did know seemed to have developed in spite of their biological peculiarity, but usually not until after the mechanical flair that often seemed to accompany the phenomenon had enabled them to escape their planet of origin for a more favorable environment.

I say more favorable because sexuality does seem to develop as an evolutionary compensation where (some terms untranslatable, some very broad, but generally describing circumstances, like extra-dense atmosphere, in which the normal rate of cosmic radiation was reduced to a degree that inhibited mutation and thus, evolution)....

As I said, this seemed almost a freak occurrence, and so it was, and is, here in the heart of the Galaxy. But in the more thinly populated spiral arms, the normal rate of radiation is considerably lower. It is only in the last few centuries that we have begun to contact with any considerable numbers of species from these sectors--and the incidence of sexuality among these peoples is markedly higher than before.

Recently, then, there has been fresh cause to investigate the causes and effects of sexuality; and there has been a comparative wealth of new material to work with.

* * * * *

(Here he goes into a review of the variety of sexual modes, ranging from two to seventeen sexes within a species, and more exotica-erotica of means, manners, and mores than a mere two-sexed biped can readily imagine. Restrain yourself. It's all in the full transcript.)

* * * * *

But let me for the moment confine myself to the simplest and most common situation, involving only two sexes. Recent investigations indicate that there is an apparently inevitable psychological effect of combining two essentially distinct sub-species in one genetic unit. (Sparks like mad.) I perceive that many of you have just experienced the same delight-dismay the first researchers felt at recognizing this so-obvious and so-overlooked parallel with the familiar cases of symbiosis.

The Terrans, mentioned earlier, are in many ways prototypical of sexuality in an intelligent species, and the usual and rather dramatic events on Aldebaran VI have added greatly to our insights into the psychology of sexuality in general.

In this culture, dualism is very deeprooted, affecting every aspect of the i-e-s complex: not just philosophy and engineering, but mathematics, for instance, and mystique.

This cultural attitude starts with a duality, or two-sided symmetry, of body structure. (Throughout this discussion he uses visual material--photos, diagrams, etc., of human bodies, anatomy, physiology, habitat, eating and mating habits, etc. Also goes off into some intriguing speculation of the chicken-or-egg type: is physical structure influenced by mental attitudes, or is it some inherent tendency of a chromosome pattern with _pairs_ of genes from _pairs_ of parents?)

In this respect, the Terrans are almost perfect prototypes, with two pairs of limbs, for locomotion and manipulation, extending from a central--single--abdominal cavity, which, although containing some single organs as well as some in pairs, is so symmetrically proportioned that the first assumption from an exterior view would be that everything inside was equally mirror-imaged. Actually, the main circulatory organ is single--though consisting of two valves; the main breathing apparatus is paired; the digestive system is single--although food intake is through an orifice with paired lips and two rows of

teeth. In both "male" and "female" types, the organ of sexual contact is single, whereas the gamete-producers are pairs. There is a single, roundish head set on top of the abdomen, containing the primary sensory organs, all of which occur in pairs. Even the brain is paired!

I mentioned earlier that it is typical of the sexual races that the flair for physical engineering is rather stronger than the instinct for communication. This was an observed but little-understood fact for many centuries; it was not till this phenomenon of dualism (and triadism for the three-sexed, etc.) was studied that the earlier observation was clarified. If you will consider briefly the various primitive sources of power and transport, you will realize that--outside of the psi-based techniques--most of these are involved with principles of symmetry and/or equivalence; these concepts are obvious to the two-sexed. On the other hand, the principle of unity, underlying all successful communication--physical, verbal, psial, or other--and which is also the basis for the application of psi to engineering problems--is for these species, in early stages, an almost mystical quality.

As with most life-forms, the reproductive act is, among sexual beings, both physically pleasurable and biologically compulsive, so that it is early equated with religio-mystic sensations. Among sexual species, these attitudes are intensified by the communicative aspects of the act. (Cartoon-type diagrams here which frankly gave me to think a bit!) We have much to learn yet about the psychology of this phenomenon, but enough has been established to make clear that the concept of unity for these races is initially almost entirely related to the use of their sexuality, and is later extended to other areas--religion and the arts of communication at first--with a mystical--indeed often reverent attitude!

I hardly need to remind you that the tendencies I have been discussing are the primitive and underlying ones. Obviously, at the point of contact, any species must have acquired at least enough sophistication in the field of physics--quanta, unified field theory, and atomic transmutation for a start--to have begun to look away from the essentially blind alley of dualistic thinking. But the extent to which these Terrans were still limited by their early developmental pattern is indicated by the almost unbelievable fact that they developed ultra-dimensional transport before discovering any more effective channels of communication than the electromagnetic!

Thus their first contacts with older civilizations were physical; and, limited as they still are almost entirely to aural and visual

communication, they were actually unable to perceive their very first contact on Aldebaran VI.

* * * * *

(Shot of Prof Eel in absolute sparkling convulsions goes to distance shots of planet and antiquated Earth spaceship in orbit: L-1 again. Then suborb launch drops, spirals to surface. Twenty bulky spacesuited figures emerge--not the same as in opening shots. This looks like actual photographic record of landing, which seems unlikely. Beautiful damn reconstruction, if so. Narration commences with Aldebaran date. I substitute Terran Calendar date we know for same, and accept gift of one more Rosetta Stone.)

This time is the year 2053. For more than six decades, this primitive giant of space has played its way through the restrictive medium of slowspace. Twice before in its travels, the great ship has paused.

First at Procyon, where they found the system both uninhabited and uninviting; and at the time they did not yet know what urgent cause they had to make a landing. (Our date for Procyon exploration, from L-1 log, is 2016, which fits.)

Then at Saiph, two decades later, when they could provide a bare minimum of hospitality--no more than safe footing for their launches, in which they would live while they tried to ensure their future survival. But this system's planets offered little hope. One Earth-size enveloped in horror-film type gases and nasty moistures. One more with dense atmosphere of high acid content: probe from ship corroded in minutes.

They limped on. A half decade later they came to a time of decision, and determined not to try for the next nearest star system, but for the closest one from which their radio had received signs of intelligent life: Aldebaran.

What they had learned between Procyon and Saiph was that those of their crew who were born in space were not viable. The ship had been planned to continue, if necessary, long beyond the lifespan of its first crew. The Terran planners had ingeniously bypassed their most acute psychosocial problem, and staffed the ship with a starting crew of just one sex. Forty females started the journey, with a supply of sperm from one hundred genetically selected males carefully preserved on board.

Sex determination in this species is in the male chromosome, and most of the supply had been selected for production of females. The plan was to maintain the ship in transit with single sexed population, and restore the normal balance only at the end of the journey.

The Terrans have apparently reached a level of self-awareness that enables them to avoid the worst dangers of their own divisive quality, while utilizing the advantages of this special (pun intended--Prof. Eel was sparking again) ambivalence. Their biological peculiarities have, among other things, developed a far greater tolerance in the females for the type of physical constraints and social pressures that were sure to accompany the long slow voyage. Males, on the other hand, being more aggressive, and more responsive to hostile challenges, would be needed for colonizing a strange planet. (Dissertation on mammals here which says nothing new, but restates from an outsider's--rather admiring--viewpoint with some distinction. Should be a textbook classic--if we can ever release this thing.)

That was the plan. But when the first females born on the trip came to maturity, and could not conceive, the plan was changed. Three male infants were born to females of the original complement--less than half of whom, even then, were still alive and of child-bearing age.

* * * * *

(Well, he tells it effectively, but adds nothing to what we know from the log. Conflicts among the women led to death of one boy, eventual suicide of another at adolescence. Remaining mature male fails to impregnate known fertile women. Hope of landing while enough fertiles remained to start again pretty well frustrated at Saiph. Decision to try for first contact made with just five fertiles left, and nearest system eight light years off--with Aldebaran still farther. Faint fantastic hope still at landing, with just one child-bearer left--the Matriarch, if you recall?)

* * * * *

Remembering the reasons for their choice of Aldebaran, you can imagine the reaction when that landing party, first, lost all radio signals as they descended; then, could find no trace whatsoever--to their senses--of habitation. The other planets were scouted, to no avail. The signals on the Mother Ship's more powerful radio continued to come from VI. One wild hypothesis was followed up by a thorough and fruitless search of the upper atmosphere. The atmosphere was barely adequate to

sustain life at the surface. Beam tracing repeatedly located the signal beacon in a mountain of VI, which showed--to the Terrans--no other sign of intelligent life.

The only logical conclusion was that they had followed a "lighthouse beacon" to an empty world. The actual explanation, of course, was in the nature of the Arlemites, the natives of Aldebaran VI.

Originating as a social-colonizing lichen, on a heavy planet, with--even at its prime--a barely adequate atmosphere, the Arlemites combined smallness of individual size with limited locomotive powers and superior air and water retentive ability. They developed, inevitably, as a highly psioid culture--as far to one end of the psychophysical scale as the Terrans are to the other. (My spelling up there. I think it represents true meaning better than "psycho".) The constantly thinning choice between physical relocation and a conscious evolutionary measure which this mature psioid race was far better equipped to undertake: the Arlemites now exist as a planet-wide diffusion of single-celled entities, comprising just one individual, and a whole species.

* * * * *

(Visual stuff here helps establish concept--as if you or I just extended the space between cells.)

* * * * *

It seems especially ironic that the Arlemites were not only one of the oldest and most psioid of peoples--so that they had virtually all the accumulated knowledge of the Galaxy at their disposal--but were also symbiote products. This background might have enabled them to comprehend the Terran mind and the problems confronting the visitors--except for the accidental combination of almost total psi-blindness in the Terrans, and the single-sexed complement of the ship.

The visitors could not perceive their hosts. The hosts could find no way to communicate with the visitors. The full complement of the ship, eventually, came down in launches, and lived in them, hopelessly, while they learned that their viability had indeed been completely lost in space. There was no real effort to return to the ship and continue the voyage. The ranks thinned, discipline was lost, deaths proliferated. Finally, it was only a child's last act of rebelliousness that

mitigated the futility of the tragedy.

The last child saw the last adult die, and saw this immobility as an opportunity to break the most inviolable of rules. She went out of the launch--into near-airlessness that killed her within minutes.

But minutes were more than enough, with the much longer time afterwards for examination of the dead brain. It was through the mind of this one child, young enough to be still partially free of the rigid mental framework that made adult Terrans so inaccessible to Arlemites, that the basis was gained for most of the knowledge we now have.

Sorrowingly, the Arlemites generated an organism to decompose the Terrans and their artifacts, removing all traces of tragedy from the planet's surface. Meanwhile, they studied what they had learned, against future needs.

* * * * *

The technological ingenuity of these young sexuals will be apparent when I tell you that only four decades after the departure of that ill-fated first ship, they were experimenting with ultra-dimensional travel. Even at the time of the landing at Aldebaran, ultra-di scouts were already exploring the systems closest to Sol. Eventually--within a decade after the child's death--one of these came to Aldebaran, and sighted the still-orbiting Mother Ship.

A second landing was clearly imminent. The Arlemites had still devised no way to aid this species to live in safety on their planet, nor did they have any means to communicate adequately with psi-negatives whose primary perceptions were aural and visual. But they did have, from the child's mind, a working knowledge of the strongest emotional symbols the culture knew, and they had long since devised a warning sign they could erect for visual perception. The statue of the Woman of Earth was constructed in an incredibly brief time through the combined efforts of the whole Arlemite consciousness.

They had no way to know that the new ship, designed for exploration, not colonizing, and equipped with ultra-di drive, which obviated the long slow traveling, was crewed entirely by males. Even had they known, they did not yet comprehend the extreme duality of the two-sexed double-culture. So they built their warning to the shape of the strongest fear-and-hate symbols of a female.

(Shot of statue, held for some time, angle moving slowly. No narration. Assuming that emotional-projection notion--and I think we must--the timing here is such that I believe they first project what they seem to think a human female would feel, looking at it. I tried women on staff here. They focused more on phallic than female component, but were just as positive in reactions as males. ??? Anyhow, like I said, no narration. What follows, though out of parens, is my own reaction.)

* * * * *

It seems more a return than a venture.

The Woman waits, as she has waited ... always?... to greet her sons, welcome us ... home?... She sits in beauty, in peacefulness, perfect, complete, clean and fresh-colored ... new?... no, forever ... open, welcoming, yet so impervious ... warm and ... untouchable?... rather, untouched ... almost but never, forgotten Goddess ... Allmother, Woman of Earth ... enveloped, enveloping, in warmth and peace ...

* * * * *

One stands back a bit: this is the peace of loving insight, of unquesting womanhood, of great age and undying youth ... the peace of the past, of life that is passed, of that immortality that nothing mortal can ever achieve except through the frozen impression of living consciousness that we call art.

The young men are deeply moved and they make jokes. "Allmother," one hears them say, sarcastically, "Old White Goddess, whaddya know?"

Then they look up and are quiet under the smiling stone eyes. Even the ancient obscenely placed spaceship in her lap is not quite absurd, as it will seem in museum models--or tragic, as is the original overhead.

(Prof. Eel goes on to summarize the conclusions that seem obvious to him. Something is awfully wrong; that's obvious to me. How did they manage to build something so powerful out of total miscomprehension? What are we up against, anyhow? And, to get back to the matter of channels, what do you think this little story would do to Spaserve brass egos? Do you want to hold it top secret a while?)

End of Transcript

* * * * *

TO: Dr. Shlomo Mouna, Sr. Anthropologist, Ozma XII, Pluto

FROM: N. R. Hennessy, Solar Council Dome, Eros

DATE: 10/10/92

TRANSMISSION: VIA tight beam, scrambled. SENT: 0312 hrs. RCVD: 1027 hrs.

Dear Shlomo:

Absolutely, let me see the full package before we release it elsewhere. I've got a few more questions, like: Do they know we're receiving it? How do we straighten them out? Or should we? Instinct says yes. Tactics says it is advantageous to be underestimated. Think best you come with package, and we'll braintrust it. Meantime, in reply to your bafflement----

"L" class ships, you should have known, are for "Lysistrata." Five of them launched during brief Matriarchy at beginning of World Government on Terra, following Final War. So sort out your symbols _now_.

And good grief, where did the _other_ four land?

NRH

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of The Lonely, by Judith Merril

The Snowball Effect

By KATHERINE MacLEAN

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Galaxy Science Fiction September 1952.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

*Tack power drives on a sewing circle and you
can needle the world into the darndest mess!*

"All right," I said, "what _is_ sociology good for?"

Wilton Caswell, Ph.D., was head of my Sociology Department, and right then he was mad enough to chew nails. On the office wall behind him were three or four framed documents in Latin that were supposed to be signs of great learning, but I didn't care at that moment if he papered the walls with his degrees. I had been appointed dean and president to see to it that the university made money. I had a job to do, and I meant to do it.

He bit off each word with great restraint: "Sociology is the study of social institutions, Mr. Halloway."

I tried to make him understand my position. "Look, it's the big-money men who are supposed to be contributing to the support of this college. To them, sociology sounds like socialism--nothing can sound worse than that--and an institution is where they put Aunt Maggy when she began collecting Wheaties in a stamp album. We can't appeal to them that way. Come on now." I smiled condescendingly, knowing it would irritate him. "What are you doing that's worth anything?"

He glared at me, his white hair bristling and his nostrils dilated like a war horse about to whinny. I can say one thing for them--these scientists and professors always keep themselves well under control. He had a book in his hand and I was expecting him to throw it, but he spoke instead:

"This department's analysis of institutional accretion, by the use of open system mathematics, has been recognized as an outstanding and valuable contribution to--"

The words were impressive, whatever they meant, but this still didn't sound like anything that would pull in money. I interrupted, "Valuable in what way?"

He sat down on the edge of his desk thoughtfully, apparently recovering from the shock of being asked to produce something solid for his position, and ran his eyes over the titles of the books that lined his office walls.

"Well, sociology has been valuable to business in initiating worker efficiency and group motivation studies, which they now use in management decisions. And, of course, since the depression, Washington has been using sociological studies of employment, labor and standards of living as a basis for its general policies of--"

I stopped him with both raised hands. "Please, Professor Caswell! That would hardly be a recommendation. Washington, the New Deal and the present Administration are somewhat touchy subjects to the men I have to deal with. They consider its value debatable, if you know what I mean. If they got the idea that sociology professors are giving advice and guidance--No, we have to stick to brass tacks and leave Washington out of this. What, specifically, has the work of this specific department done that would make it as worthy to receive money as--say, a heart disease research fund?"

He began to tap the corner of his book absently on the desk, watching me. "Fundamental research doesn't show immediate effects, Mr. Halloway, but its value is recognized."

I smiled and took out my pipe. "All right, tell me about it. Maybe I'll recognize its value."

Prof. Caswell smiled back tightly. He knew his department was at stake. The other departments were popular with donors and pulled in gift money by scholarships and fellowships, and supported their professors and graduate students by research contracts with the government and industry. Caswell had to show a way to make his own department popular--or else. I couldn't fire him directly, of course, but there are ways of doing it indirectly.

* * * * *

He laid down his book and ran a hand over his ruffled hair.

"Institutions--organizations, that is--" his voice became more resonant; like most professors, when he had to explain something he instinctively slipped into his platform lecture mannerisms, and began to deliver an essay--"have certain tendencies built into the way they happen to have been organized, which cause them to expand or contract without reference to the needs they were founded to serve."

He was becoming flushed with the pleasure of explaining his subject. "All through the ages, it has been a matter of wonder and dismay to men that a simple organization--such as a church to worship in, or a delegation of weapons to a warrior class merely for defense against an outside enemy--will either grow insensately and extend its control until it is a tyranny over their whole lives, or, like other organizations set up to serve a vital need, will tend to repeatedly dwindle and vanish, and have to be painfully rebuilt.

"The reason can be traced to little quirks in the way they were organized, a matter of positive and negative power feedbacks. Such simple questions as, 'Is there a way a holder of authority in this organization can use the power available to him to increase his power?' provide the key. But it still could not be handled until the complex questions of interacting motives and long-range accumulations of minor effects could somehow be simplified and formulated. In working on the problem, I found that the mathematics of open system, as introduced to biology by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and George Kreezer, could be used as a base that would enable me to develop a specifically social mathematics, expressing the human factors of intermeshing authority and motives in simple formulas.

"By these formulations, it is possible to determine automatically the amount of growth and period of life of any organization. The UN, to choose an unfortunate example, is a shrinker type organization. Its monetary support is not in the hands of those who personally benefit by its governmental activities, but, instead, in the hands of those who would personally lose by any extension and encroachment of its authority on their own. Yet by the use of formula analysis--"

"That's theory," I said. "How about proof?"

"My equations are already being used in the study of limited-size Federal corporations. Washington--"

I held up my palm again. "Please, not that nasty word again. I mean, where else has it been put into operation? Just a simple demonstration,

something to show that it works, that's all."

He looked away from me thoughtfully, picked up the book and began to tap it on the desk again. It had some unreadable title and his name on it in gold letters. I got the distinct impression again that he was repressing an urge to hit me with it.

He spoke quietly. "All right, I'll give you a demonstration. Are you willing to wait six months?"

"Certainly, if you can show me something at the end of that time."

Reminded of time, I glanced at my watch and stood up.

"Could we discuss this over lunch?" he asked.

"I wouldn't mind hearing more, but I'm having lunch with some executors of a millionaire's will. They have to be convinced that by, 'furtherance of research into human ills,' he meant that the money should go to research fellowships for postgraduate biologists at the university, rather than to a medical foundation."

"I see you have your problems, too," Caswell said, conceding me nothing. He extended his hand with a chilly smile. "Well, good afternoon, Mr. Holloway. I'm glad we had this talk."

I shook hands and left him standing there, sure of his place in the progress of science and the respect of his colleagues, yet seething inside because I, the president and dean, had boorishly demanded that he produce something tangible.

I frankly didn't give a hoot if he blew his lid. My job isn't easy. For a crumb of favorable publicity and respect in the newspapers and an annual ceremony in a silly costume, I spend the rest of the year going hat in hand, asking politely for money at everyone's door, like a well-dressed panhandler, and trying to manage the university on the dribble I get. As far as I was concerned, a department had to support itself or be cut down to what student tuition pays for, which is a handful of over-crowded courses taught by an assistant lecturer. Caswell had to make it work or get out.

But the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to hear what he was going to do for a demonstration.

* * * * *

At lunch, three days later, while we were waiting for our order, he opened a small notebook. "Ever hear of feedback effects?"

"Not enough to have it clear."

"You know the snowball effect, though."

"Sure, start a snowball rolling downhill and it grows."

"Well, now--" He wrote a short line of symbols on a blank page and turned the notebook around for me to inspect it. "Here's the formula for the snowball process. It's the basic general growth formula--covers everything."

It was a row of little symbols arranged like an algebra equation. One was a concentric spiral going up, like a cross-section of a snowball rolling in snow. That was a growth sign.

I hadn't expected to understand the equation, but it was almost as clear as a sentence. I was impressed and slightly intimidated by it. He had already explained enough so that I knew that, if he was right, here was the growth of the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire, the conquests of Alexander and the spread of the smoking habit and the change and rigidity of the unwritten law of styles.

"Is it really as simple as that?" I asked.

"You notice," he said, "that when it becomes too heavy for the cohesion strength of snow, it breaks apart. Now in human terms--"

The chops and mashed potatoes and peas arrived.

"Go on," I urged.

He was deep in the symbology of human motives and the equations of human behavior in groups. After running through a few different types of grower and shrinker type organizations, we came back to the snowball, and decided to run the test by making something grow.

"You add the motives," he said, "and the equation will translate them into organization."

"How about a good selfish reason for the ins to drag others into the group--some sort of bounty on new members, a cut of their membership fee?" I suggested uncertainly, feeling slightly foolish. "And maybe a reason why the members would lose if any of them resigned, and some indirect way they could use to force each other to stay in."

"The first is the chain letter principle," he nodded. "I've got that. The other...." He put the symbols through some mathematical manipulation so that a special grouping appeared in the middle of the equation. "That's it."

Since I seemed to have the right idea, I suggested some more, and he added some, and juggled them around in different patterns. We threw out a few that would have made the organization too complicated, and finally worked out an idyllically simple and deadly little organization setup where joining had all the temptation of buying a sweepstakes ticket, going in deeper was as easy as hanging around a race track, and getting out was like trying to pull free from a Malayan thumb trap. We put our heads closer together and talked lower, picking the best place for the demonstration.

"Abington?"

"How about Watashaw? I have some student sociological surveys of it already. We can pick a suitable group from that."

"This demonstration has got to be convincing. We'd better pick a little group that no one in his right mind would expect to grow."

"There should be a suitable club--"

Picture Professor Caswell, head of the Department of Sociology, and with him the President of the University, leaning across the table toward each other, sipping coffee and talking in conspiratorial tones over something they were writing in a notebook.

That was us.

* * * * *

"Ladies," said the skinny female chairman of the Watashaw Sewing Circle. "Today we have guests." She signaled for us to rise, and we stood up, bowing to polite applause and smiles. "Professor Caswell, and Professor Smith." (My alias.) "They are making a survey of the methods

and duties of the clubs of Watashaw."

We sat down to another ripple of applause and slightly wider smiles, and then the meeting of the Watashaw Sewing Circle began. In five minutes I began to feel sleepy.

There were only about thirty people there, and it was a small room, not the halls of Congress, but they discussed their business of collecting and repairing second hand clothing for charity with the same endless boring parliamentary formality.

I pointed out to Caswell the member I thought would be the natural leader, a tall, well-built woman in a green suit, with conscious gestures and a resonant, penetrating voice, and then went into a half doze while Caswell stayed awake beside me and wrote in his notebook. After a while the resonant voice roused me to attention for a moment. It was the tall woman holding the floor over some collective dereliction of the club. She was being scathing.

I nudged Caswell and murmured, "Did you fix it so that a shover has a better chance of getting into office than a non-shover?"

"I think there's a way they could find for it," Caswell whispered back, and went to work on his equation again. "Yes, several ways to bias the elections."

"Good. Point them out tactfully to the one you select. Not as if she'd use such methods, but just as an example of the reason why only she can be trusted with initiating the change. Just mention all the personal advantages an unscrupulous person could have."

He nodded, keeping a straight and sober face as if we were exchanging admiring remarks about the techniques of clothes repairing, instead of conspiring.

After the meeting, Caswell drew the tall woman in the green suit aside and spoke to her confidentially, showing her the diagram of organization we had drawn up. I saw the responsive glitter in the woman's eyes and knew she was hooked.

We left the diagram of organization and our typed copy of the new bylaws with her and went off soberly, as befitted two social science experimenters. We didn't start laughing until our car passed the town limits and began the climb for University Heights.

If Caswell's equations meant anything at all, we had given that sewing circle more growth drives than the Roman Empire.

* * * * *

Four months later I had time out from a very busy schedule to wonder how the test was coming along. Passing Caswell's office, I put my head in. He looked up from a student research paper he was correcting.

"Caswell, about that sewing club business--I'm beginning to feel the suspense. Could I get an advance report on how it's coming?"

"I'm not following it. We're supposed to let it run the full six months."

"But I'm curious. Could I get in touch with that woman--what's her name?"

"Searles. Mrs. George Searles."

"Would that change the results?"

"Not in the slightest. If you want to graph the membership rise, it should be going up in a log curve, probably doubling every so often."

I grinned. "If it's not rising, you're fired."

He grinned back. "If it's not rising, you won't have to fire me--I'll burn my books and shoot myself."

I returned to my office and put in a call to Watashaw.

While I was waiting for the phone to be answered, I took a piece of graph paper and ruled it off into six sections, one for each month. After the phone had rung in the distance for a long time, a servant answered with a bored drawl:

"Mrs. Searles' residence."

I picked up a red gummed star and licked it.

"Mrs. Searles, please."

"She's not in just now. Could I take a message?"

I placed the star at the thirty line in the beginning of the first section. Thirty members they'd started with.

"No, thanks. Could you tell me when she'll be back?"

"Not until dinner. She's at the meetin'."

"The sewing club?" I asked.

"No, sir, not that thing. There isn't any Sewing club any more, not for a long time. She's at the Civic Welfare meeting."

Somehow I hadn't expected anything like that.

"Thank you," I said and hung up, and after a moment noticed I was holding a box of red gummed stars in my hand. I closed it and put it down on top of the graph of membership in the sewing circle. No more members....

Poor Caswell. The bet between us was ironclad. He wouldn't let me back down on it even if I wanted to. He'd probably quit before I put through the first slow move to fire him. His professional pride would be shattered, sunk without a trace. I remembered what he said about shooting himself. It had seemed funny to both of us at the time, but.... What a mess _that_ would make for the university.

I had to talk to Mrs. Searles. Perhaps there was some outside reason why the club had disbanded. Perhaps it had not just died.

I called back. "This is Professor Smith," I said, giving the alias I had used before. "I called a few minutes ago. When did you say Mrs. Searles will return?"

"About six-thirty or seven o'clock."

Five hours to wait.

And what if Caswell asked me what I had found out in the meantime? I didn't want to tell him anything until I had talked it over with that woman Searles first.

"Where is this Civic Welfare meeting?"

She told me.

Five minutes later, I was in my car, heading for Watashaw, driving considerably faster than my usual speed and keeping a careful watch for highway patrol cars as the speedometer climbed.

* * * * *

The town meeting hall and theater was a big place, probably with lots of small rooms for different clubs. I went in through the center door and found myself in the huge central hall where some sort of rally was being held. A political-type rally--you know, cheers and chants, with bunting already down on the floor, people holding banners, and plenty of enthusiasm and excitement in the air. Someone was making a speech up on the platform. Most of the people there were women.

I wondered how the Civic Welfare League could dare hold its meeting at the same time as a political rally that could pull its members away. The group with Mrs. Searles was probably holding a shrunken and almost memberless meeting somewhere in an upper room.

There probably was a side door that would lead upstairs.

While I glanced around, a pretty girl usher put a printed bulletin in my hand, whispering, "Here's one of the new copies." As I attempted to hand it back, she retreated. "Oh, you can keep it. It's the new one. Everyone's supposed to have it. We've just printed up six thousand copies to make sure there'll be enough to last."

The tall woman on the platform had been making a driving, forceful speech about some plans for rebuilding Watashaw's slum section. It began to penetrate my mind dimly as I glanced down at the bulletin in my hands.

"Civic Welfare League of Watashaw. The United Organization of Church and Secular Charities." That's what it said. Below began the rules of membership.

I looked up. The speaker, with a clear, determined voice and conscious, forceful gestures, had entered the homestretch of her speech, an appeal to the civic pride of all citizens of Watashaw.

"With a bright and glorious future--potentially without poor and

without uncared-for ill--potentially with no ugliness, no vistas which are not beautiful--the best people in the best planned town in the country--the jewel of the United States."

She paused and then leaned forward intensely, striking her clenched hand on the speaker's stand with each word for emphasis.

"_All we need is more members. Now get out there and recruit!_"

I finally recognized Mrs. Searles, as an answering sudden blast of sound half deafened me. The crowd was chanting at the top of its lungs: "Recruit! Recruit!"

Mrs. Searles stood still at the speaker's table and behind her, seated in a row of chairs, was a group that was probably the board of directors. It was mostly women, and the women began to look vaguely familiar, as if they could be members of the sewing circle.

I put my lips close to the ear of the pretty usher while I turned over the stiff printed bulletin on a hunch. "How long has the League been organized?" On the back of the bulletin was a constitution.

She was cheering with the crowd, her eyes sparkling. "I don't know," she answered between cheers. "I only joined two days ago. Isn't it wonderful?"

I went into the quiet outer air and got into my car with my skin prickling. Even as I drove away, I could hear them. They were singing some kind of organization song with the tune of "Marching through Georgia."

Even at the single glance I had given it, the constitution looked exactly like the one we had given the Watashaw Sewing Circle.

All I told Caswell when I got back was that the sewing circle had changed its name and the membership seemed to be rising.

* * * * *

Next day, after calling Mrs. Searles, I placed some red stars on my graph for the first three months. They made a nice curve, rising more steeply as it reached the fourth month. They had picked up their first increase in membership simply by amalgamating with all the other types of charity organizations in Watashaw, changing the club name with each

fusion, but keeping the same constitution--the constitution with the bright promise of advantages as long as there were always new members being brought in.

By the fifth month, the League had added a mutual baby-sitting service and had induced the local school board to add a nursery school to the town service, so as to free more women for League activity. But charity must have been completely organized by then, and expansion had to be in other directions.

Some real estate agents evidently had been drawn into the whirlpool early, along with their ideas. The slum improvement plans began to blossom and take on a tinge of real estate planning later in the month.

The first day of the sixth month, a big two page spread appeared in the local paper of a mass meeting which had approved a full-fledged scheme for slum clearance of Watashaw's shack-town section, plus plans for rehousing, civic building, and rezoning. _And_ good prospects for attracting some new industries to the town, industries which had already been contacted and seemed interested by the privileges offered.

And with all this, an arrangement for securing and distributing to the club members _alone_ most of the profit that would come to the town in the form of a rise in the price of building sites and a boom in the building industry. The profit distributing arrangement was the same one that had been built into the organization plan for the distribution of the small profits of membership fees and honorary promotions. It was becoming an openly profitable business. Membership was rising more rapidly now.

By the second week of the sixth month, news appeared in the local paper that the club had filed an application to incorporate itself as the Watashaw Mutual Trade and Civic Development Corporation, and all the local real estate promoters had finished joining en masse. The Mutual Trade part sounded to me as if the Chamber of Commerce was on the point of being pulled in with them, ideas, ambitions and all.

I chuckled while reading the next page of the paper, on which a local politician was reported as having addressed the club with a long flowery oration on their enterprise, charity, and civic spirit. He had been made an honorary member. If he allowed himself to be made a _full_ member with its contractual obligations and its lures, if the politicians went into this, too....

I laughed, filing the newspaper with the other documents on the Watashaw test. These proofs would fascinate any businessman with the sense to see where his bread was buttered. A businessman is constantly dealing with organizations, including his own, and finding them either inert, cantankerous, or both. Caswell's formula could be a handle to grasp them with. Gratitude alone would bring money into the university in carload lots.

* * * * *

The end of the sixth month came. The test was over and the end reports were spectacular. Caswell's formulas were proven to the hilt.

After reading the last newspaper reports, I called him up.

"Perfect, Wilt, _perfect_! I can use this Watashaw thing to get you so many fellowships and scholarships and grants for your department that you'll think it's snowing money!"

He answered somewhat disinterestedly, "I've been busy working with students on their research papers and marking tests--not following the Watashaw business at all, I'm afraid. You say the demonstration went well and you're satisfied?"

He was definitely putting on a chill. We were friends now, but obviously he was still peeved whenever he was reminded that I had doubted that his theory could work. And he was using its success to rub my nose in the realization that I had been wrong. A man with a string of degrees after his name is just as human as anyone else. I had needed him pretty hard that first time.

"I'm satisfied," I acknowledged. "I was wrong. The formulas work beautifully. Come over and see my file of documents on it if you want a boost for your ego. Now let's see the formula for stopping it."

He sounded cheerful again. "I didn't complicate that organization with negatives. I wanted it to _grow_. It falls apart naturally when it stops growing for more than two months. It's like the great stock boom before an economic crash. Everyone in it is prosperous as long as the prices just keep going up and new buyers come into the market, but they all knew what would happen if it stopped growing. You remember, we built in as one of the incentives that the members know they are going to lose if membership stops growing. Why, if I tried to stop it now, they'd cut my throat."

I remembered the drive and frenzy of the crowd in the one early meeting I had seen. They probably would.

"No," he continued. "We'll just let it play out to the end of its tether and die of old age."

"When will that be?"

"It can't grow past the female population of the town. There are only so many women in Watashaw, and some of them don't like sewing."

The graph on the desk before me began to look sinister. Surely Caswell must have made some provision for--

"You underestimate their ingenuity," I said into the phone. "Since they wanted to expand, they didn't stick to sewing. They went from general charity to social welfare schemes to something that's pretty close to an incorporated government. The name is now the Watashaw Mutual Trade and Civic Development Corporation, and they're filing an application to change it to Civic Property Pool and Social Dividend, membership contractual, open to all. That social dividend sounds like a Technocrat climbed on the band wagon, eh?"

While I spoke, I carefully added another red star to the curve above the thousand member level, checking with the newspaper that still lay open on my desk. The curve was definitely some sort of log curve now, growing more rapidly with each increase.

"Leaving out practical limitations for a moment, where does the formula say it will stop?" I asked.

"When you run out of people to join it. But after all, there are only so many people in Watashaw. It's a pretty small town."

* * * * *

"They've opened a branch office in New York," I said carefully into the phone, a few weeks later.

With my pencil, very carefully, I extended the membership curve from where it was then.

After the next doubling, the curve went almost straight up and off the

page.

Allowing for a lag of contagion from one nation to another, depending on how much their citizens intermingled, I'd give the rest of the world about twelve years.

There was a long silence while Caswell probably drew the same graph in his own mind. Then he laughed weakly. "Well, you asked me for a demonstration."

That was as good an answer as any. We got together and had lunch in a bar, if you can call it lunch. The movement we started will expand by hook or by crook, by seduction or by bribery or by propaganda or by conquest, but it will expand. And maybe a total world government will be a fine thing--until it hits the end of its rope in twelve years or so.

What happens then, I don't know.

But I don't want anyone to pin that on me. From now on, if anyone asks me, I've never heard of Watashaw.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

By JOY LEACHE

[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
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*Interstellar trouble-shooting is the
easiest work there is. All you need is
brains, energy--and a steno with nice legs!*

Andrew Stephens was trying to think of two things at once, and it wasn't working out. An inspirational message (delivered by Crumbly, president of Planetary Promotions, Inc.) was mixing itself up in his mind with the probable difficulties of his first company assignment.

He hoped he was thinking, and not worrying. Crumbly said worry was fatal in the promotion business. It was fervor, not fret, Crumbly said, that had made Planetary Promotions, Inc., what it was today. And it was work, not worry, that would make it what it was destined to be tomorrow.

Andy Stephens stared at the farthest corner of his office (about four feet from his nose) and sighed. He didn't have a slogan in his body, let alone on (or off) the top of his head.

His assignment was an easy one, Crumbly had assured him. Planetary Promotions always started new men off with easy ones. Only fair.

Andy squared his narrowish shoulders in as close an imitation of Crumbly's desk-side manner as he could, and picked up the dope sheet.

It seemed there was a planet, Felix II, somewhere near the edge of nowhere. It wanted to join the Galactic Federation.

A laudable desire, Andy thought, but strictly a political matter, having nothing to do with Planetary Promotions, or Andrew Stephens.

However, it also seemed that a planet had to demonstrate that it would be contributing something to the Federation before it was allowed to

join. In other words, Andy thought, you have to have something they want, or they won't let you in.

A buzzer squawked out of the dun-colored box on his desk. Andy jumped, and flipped the lever.

"The bus to the port will be at the door in seven minutes," the grim voice of the Lower Office Co-ordinator told him. "A stenographer will meet you on the ship."

"Thank you, Miss Ellis," Andy said meekly. He stuffed the dope sheet into his jacket and left the Main Office for Felix II.

* * * * *

"Excuse me," said a feminine voice. "Are you with Planetary Promotions?"

Andy looked up. A sandy-haired girl with a passable figure and nice legs was looking down at him. "Yes," he said. "I'm Andy Stephens."

The girl looked relieved. "I'm Edith Featherpenny from the steno pool," she said. "I was afraid I wouldn't be able to find you."

"Sit down," Andy invited.

He moved, and Miss Featherpenny moved. Between them, they unsettled a large woman eating an orange. When the juice had been mopped up and the woman apologized to, Miss Featherpenny squeezed in beside Andy.

"Is that the information on the case?" She indicated the dope sheet crumpled under Andy's arm.

"Yes." Andy tried to pull it out. "Were you issued one?" He moved his elbow and tried again.

The orange woman glared at him.

Miss Featherpenny shook her head. "Miss Ellis told me you'd tell me everything I needed to know."

Andy felt obscurely flattered. "It doesn't look too promising," he admitted.

Miss Featherpenny glanced at the dope sheet and found a ray of hope.

"The Federation only requires that the Felician exports are nearly as valuable as their imports," she pointed out. "'Nearly' is a nice vague, maneuverable word."

"But," said Andy, "if the Felicians can't think of anything to sell, how do they expect me to?"

"Maybe they're too isolated to know what's in demand," Miss Featherpenny comforted him. "It says they won't authorize ships to land on the planet except by invitation."

"It might be isolation, I suppose," Andy doubted. He felt an urge to confide in Miss Featherpenny. She did, after all, look as if there might be something besides fluff in her head.

"Look," he said. "This is my first assignment, on my fourth job, on my second career. I've got to make good. My father is beginning to get impatient."

Miss Featherpenny's eyes grew softer. "Fathers are usually more patient than their children think," she encouraged.

"But," Andy added morosely, "I have a brother, a salesman with Universal Products. He keeps getting promoted, and I keep getting fired. Dad must be conscious of the contrast."

"Maybe," Miss Featherpenny suggested, "your brother's been lucky. You know, being assigned jobs that were easier than they sound."

Andy glanced at her to see if he was being humored. He decided he was not, or not much. "I've tried to believe that," he admitted.

"Unfortunately, Lloyd keeps proving me wrong. He got his last promotion for selling fancy food products to the Mahridgians."

Miss Featherpenny had obviously never even heard of Mahridge.

"They have a strong taboo against eating," Andy explained. "They swallow concentrates to keep alive, but it's still not quite decent. On Mahridge, it's the dining room, not the bathroom, that has a door with a lock on it for privacy."

"Is he married?" asked Miss Featherpenny, who didn't intend to be a steno all her life. "I mean," she added quickly, "his wife would get anxious about his selling something like that, that could get him put

in prison, or killed. How did he do it?"

There was a certain coolness in Andy's voice. "He took a lead from the dope peddlers. He converted the adolescent Mahridgians first. It's all right to eat on Mahridge now."

Miss Featherpenny diplomatized. "I don't think that's ethical. Convincing people to do what they think is wrong."

Andy was still suspicious. He said, "Ethical or not, he got the promotion."

* * * * *

They stood at the edge of the only launching pad on Felix II, and surveyed the landscape. Thirty feet away, there was a barnsized stone building with a weedy roof. Aside from some rounded blue hills in the distance, and a Felician leaning against the building, there was not much to detain the eye.

Miss Featherpenny giggled softly in surprise. "He looks like a leprechaun," she said. "The sheet didn't say that."

"Tourist trade," Andy breathed, his eyes gleaming with the solution of his problem.

Since the two-foot-tall welcoming committee showed no signs of moving, they started toward him.

"My name," Andy said in Galactic, "is Andrew Stephens. I'm here from Planetary Promotions."

"I know," the Felician muttered ungraciously. "I came out from town to meet you. My name is Blahrog. Who's this?"

"My steno, Miss Featherpenny."

"Urk." Obviously Blahrog had never heard the term "steno" and was interpreting it freely. "I'm in charge of our admission to the Federation. That means I'm in charge of you." He eyed Andy unenthusiastically. "You haven't had much experience with this kind of thing, have you?"

Andy had a wild rush of hope. If the Felician government rejected him

as a representative, he could go home without a failure on his record, and pray for a simpler assignment. Even P. P. didn't consider an agent responsible for the unpredictable whims of aliens.

"No, I haven't," he replied cheerfully. "I was hoping maybe you had."

Miss Featherpenny, who hadn't read the contract, gasped.

Blahrog, who had read the contract, replied, "I haven't. Let's get on into town where we can discuss the possibilities in comfort."

They set out, walking unequally through the thick white dust that passed for paving on Felix II.

"Don't you use ground cars?" Miss Featherpenny choked at the end of the first half-mile.

"Don't have technology," Blahrog growled, stumping grimly along. "The Everking has a car, but he doesn't use it much. No fuel."

As he walked, Andy composed a speech on the merits of the tourist business, to be delivered to the Everking.

Miss Featherpenny grew visibly more depressed with each mile. She uttered an involuntary cry when the guard of the city gate appeared with a slender mug in each hand.

"Felician ladies don't drink," Blahrog said gruffly.

"I can fetch you a glass of water," the guard offered, without enthusiasm.

"Thank you," said Miss Featherpenny, with an attempt at sincerity.

The contents of his mug made Andy choke. "Tastes something like cider," he gasped.

Blahrog downed his without a wink. "It's customary to give a guest a mug of Throatduster as a sign of gratitude because he walked so far in the dust."

"In this dust," Miss Featherpenny murmured to her second glass of water, "any distance is far."

"Thoughtful custom," Andy said quickly. "Could you export the beverage?"

"Sell Throatduster?" Blahrog was indignant. "It would be a breach of hospitality. Besides, Felix II can't produce enough second-rate stuff, let alone first-rate. Sometimes, in a bad year, we have to greet guests with water."

"What a pity," said Miss Featherpenny.

* * * * *

She became increasingly unsympathetic as Andy swallowed another Throatduster at the door of the Palace (a one-story building similar to a small barn), and yet another in the presence of the Everking (an eighteen-inch Felician with a beard-warmed paunch).

Andy watched the Everking dim and blur on his wooden throne. Swaying slightly, he muttered, "I wonder what proof this stuff is?"

"In short, Mr. Stephens," Blahrog was translating, "we cannot think of a single product which we could sell. Have you any immediate suggestions?"

Blahrog's expression indicated that he ought to say something, but Andy couldn't think of a thing, except that he didn't need any more Throatduster. "No," he said firmly, if faintly. "Thank you very much, but no." He passed out cold.

"I'm afraid the journey was too much for him," Miss Featherpenny put in.

"Ah, yes," Blahrog translated for the Everking. "Throatduster has that effect on some life forms. Perhaps he had better retire, and discuss the situation more fully tomorrow."

The Everking motioned to a pair of stout-looking guards (thirty inches tall, at least). They towed Miss Featherpenny's immediate superior out of the royal presence.

"They will show him to his room," Blahrog explained.

The Everking let loose a quick stream of Felician.

"Would you," Blahrog addressed Miss Featherpenny, "enjoy meeting my daughter? The Everking suggests it, since our affairs could hardly be

of interest to you."

"I'd be very pleased." The words were not empty ones. Edith Featherpenny's education in coping with men had not extended to Felician males. Blahrog frightened her with a feeling of superior and incomprehensible intelligence.

Hrom, although seventeen inches tall and weighing perhaps eleven pounds, was definitely feminine and comprehensible.

"Why don't women drink Throatduster?" Miss Featherpenny asked, on the strength of a two-hour acquaintance.

"The men grow the grain here," Hrom explained, "and it's theirs as long as it's in the fields. However, we consider harvesting women's work. We also make the Throatduster. Then we sell it to the men. We don't drink because it is uneconomical."

"Does everyone grow his own grain?"

"Not any more. Town women have other sources of dress money. The custom started that way, that's all."

"If you'll forgive my saying so," Miss Featherpenny remarked, "that dress you are wearing must have taken a big chunk out of your pocket."

Hrom sighed. "In my mother's time, I would have thought nothing of it. Now, one such gown is all I can afford."

"I would have thought your father was one of the wealthier men on Felix II," Miss Featherpenny remarked.

"He is _the_ wealthiest," Hrom said. "The richest man is always Minister of Finance. It's only reasonable." Her tone changed. "We're all poor now, since the tourist industry failed. It took every dnot we had to pay for the contract."

Invisible antennae shot from Miss Featherpenny's forehead. "You must be quite sure that Planetary Promotions won't fail you." She tried her best to sound casual.

Hrom smiled faintly. "Have another of these seed cakes," she said.

"Thank you. They are delicious." Miss Featherpenny took one, regardless

of calories. "Of course, there is the guarantee clause: 'Double your money back.'"

Hrom busily fluffed a cushion. "One must have some insurance," she said, having her turn at sounding casual. "Tell me, are they wearing large or small hats on Earth this season?"

Miss Featherpenny conceded defeat. "It's all bonnets for summer," she said.

* * * * *

Her first impulse was to tell Andy that she thought the Felicians had bought the guarantee clause, not the contract. It died at her first sight of the morning-after Andy. The situation must be pretty desperate, she rationalized, when the wealthiest girl on the planet has only one dress. This is probably their last chance.

Andy tried to conceal his headache by being brisk and efficient. "Have you considered your natural resources?"

Blahrog, slow and shrewdly inefficient, said, "We mine soft coal. Enough for our own fires and to spare."

"No one within a hundred light-years of Felix II uses coal for fuel anymore," Andy said gently. "Do you have enough for the plastic industries?"

"We have four freighters surplus every season." Blahrog was evidently banking heavily on the coal.

Andy wondered if coal were the only surplus on Felix II. "What are you doing with your surplus at present?" he inquired tactfully, hoping that Blahrog would realize, without being told, the impossibility of supporting the population of Felix II on four freighters of soft coal.

"We store it up," was the crafty answer, "and sell it to the synthetics plants on Darius IV when the Ionian miners go on strike."

"How long since the Ionians struck?" If this economic event occurred regularly, the coal surplus could assist in meeting the Federation's requirements.

"Twenty seasons or so." Blahrog's tone was off-handed, but his eyes

slid guiltily toward Andy and away again.

Andy sighed. "Any other resources?"

They went quickly through minerals, agricultural products and animal skins; established that Felicians could not teleport, levitate or read minds. They were technologically uneducated, and had no industry on the factory-system level.

"It is coal or nothing, Mr. Stephens," Blahrog said with finality.

"Isn't there some way to make the Federation believe that our coal is superior to other coal, and worth more?"

"Do you, perchance, own a sizable proportion of Felician coal reserves?"

Blahrog nodded, guilty looking again.

"Well, forget it. There isn't enough."

* * * * *

The Everking, who had been holding Andy's translator to his ear in silence, burst into speech.

"His Foreverness says," Blahrog remarked cannily, "that it appears impossible for Felix II to join the Federation."

"We aren't through yet," Andy said quickly. "What about the tourist industry? If you'd allow visitors and advertise a little...."

"No," the Everking shouted, in Galactic.

"We tried that during the last reign," Blahrog said. "It didn't work."

"You're pretty far off the shipping lanes, I'll admit," Andy said, "but surely you could attract enough tourists from somewhere to show a profit."

"We showed a profit," Blahrog said morosely.

He translated a remark of the Everking's. "We made money hand over fist."

"Then why did you quit?" Andy was baffled. "Why did you restrict the

planet?"

"Because of the way we happen to look."

"Like leprechauns," Miss Featherpenny explained. "And Hrom looks exactly like a little Christmas fairy."

Blahrog winced. "The tourists found us amusing. We weren't real to them. It became difficult for us to seem real to ourselves. Most of my generation couldn't grow up. The birth rate dropped. We closed the planet to keep the race alive. That's all there is to it."

"Surely," Andy protested, "if you handled it differently...."

"Tourists," Blahrog translated for the Everking, "are out of the question."

"I remember hearing about an intelligent life form that resembled teddy bears," Miss Featherpenny said thoughtfully. "Everybody loved them on sight."

"What happened to them?" Blahrog asked with interest.

"They became extinct."

* * * * *

Andy glared at her. How could he accomplish anything with a stupid steno butting in? She looked away, guilty.

"It's such a simple solution," he said. "It fits your situation perfectly."

"That's what we thought, until we tried it," Blahrog said, grinning sidelong at Miss Featherpenny.

"If you won't try tourists," Andy snapped at both of them, "I don't see exactly what you can do."

"Maybe you didn't cover everything in the special abilities list," Miss Featherpenny suggested softly.

Andy glared at her again. "All right, Blahrog. Can you think of anything you can do that most other species can't?"

Blahrog looked at the floor and considered. "We can walk a long way without getting tired," he offered.

Andy sighed, and wrote "Endurance?" on his scratch pad. It was scarcely saleable. "Is there anything else? Anything you know how to make? Besides Throatduster."

"We make good shoes," Blahrog said hopefully. "The tourists used to buy lots of them."

"Hum," Andy cogitated. "Here we have something for which a market already exists. If we can expand the market and the production facilities...." He nailed Blahrog with a finger, in conscious imitation of Crumbly. "How many pairs of shoes can Felix II produce in a single season?"

"If the reserves were called in to the Cobbler's Guild, it would be almost half the manpower of the planet...." Blahrog paused, doing mental arithmetic. "Four and a half million pairs, more or less." He sounded as though he were surprised.

"That ought to do it," Andy said gleefully.

"But where will we find that many pairs of feet?" Blahrog asked.

"There are eight million times that many pairs of feet in the Federation," Andy said. "Leave the advertising to Planetary Promotions."

"It seems sort of poetic," Miss Featherpenny romanced. "Leprechauns are supposed to be cobblers."

Blahrog snorted.

Andy turned and addressed her from the full distance between a promoter third class and a girl from the steno pool. "Miss Featherpenny, I will ask for your opinion when I want it."

Miss Featherpenny answered from her side of the gulf. "Yes, sir."

Andy had always despised rank-pullers. He turned to Blahrog "I'll have to send the dope back to the Home Office so they can put it through the computer and send me the ad-intensity index."

Blahrog looked a polite enquiry.

"That will tell us how effective the ad campaign will have to be to make a go of this. What's the fastest way to send a message to Earth?"

"Radiogram the satellite station," Blahrog answered. "They'll relay it to the next ship within range, and the ship will relay it to the next planet it nears with the radiogram facilities to send it to Earth."

"How long will it take to get an answer?" Andy asked.

"About twelve days."

* * * * *

They didn't stare at the sky while they waited for the answer.

Blahrog called the members of the Cobbler's Guild together, and delivered a series of lectures on their importance to the future of Felix II.

Foreseeing a return to political and economic power, the reserve members dusted off their lasts and aprons and got back into practice. For the first time in nearly thirty seasons, the applications for apprenticeship were too numerous to handle. New life showed on their faces.

The Master Cobblers (including the Everking and Blahrog) worked around the clock, fabricating plastic lasts. Miss Featherpenny and Hrom dug pictures and descriptions of the various types of Galactic feet that habitually or occasionally wore shoes out of old periodicals, located by members of the newly-organized ladies' auxiliary.

Felix II was humming, if not absolutely singing, with industry and good humor. Some of it rubbed off on Andy. He relented toward Miss Featherpenny to the extent of presenting her with a pair of Felician shoes, fabricated by the Everking. They were of the sensible walking variety, and not Miss Featherpenny's style. Nevertheless, she was extremely pleased with the gift. Like all Felician shoes, they fit her perfectly.

The Everking, backed by his Debators and ministers, issued public thanks to one Andrew Stephens, restorer of hope, and propagator of economic equality. The ladies' auxiliary gave a tea in Miss

Featherpenny's honor. They were both showered with gifts from a grateful and admiring populace.

The reply to the message was signed by Crumbly himself. "Forlorn hope," it said unsympathetically. "Try something else. Computer indicates ad intensity of 0.94."

An ad intensity of 0.0001 means you sell someone something he wants anyway. An intensity of 1.0 means you have to make the consumer love something he thinks he hates.

* * * * *

Andy sent a young Felician on the run for Blahrog, and retired to the storeroom of Blahrog's dwelling, which housed two fair-sized plastic barrels of Throatduster.

"But you have to try," Blahrog insisted, finishing his second mug of hospitality.

"Snow good," Andy said, deep into his fifth. "Even Gray Flannel, ad man in legend, only got to 0.87. Simpossible."

Blahrog, who knew little about advertising or computers, repeated, "You must try. No member of the Cobbler's Guild has ever quit without trying."

Andy had been accepted as an apprentice of the Guild the night before.

"Dunno," he said. "Tell you simpossible."

Blahrog climbed off the barrel of Throatduster. "I'll go get Miss Featherpenny," he said. "Perhaps she can help you."

"Miss Featherpenny. Bah," Andy snorted. "What good would she be? Dumb steno." He tried to be fair. "Nice legs, I admit. But no brains."

"I'll go get Miss Featherpenny," Blahrog repeated firmly, closing the door behind him....

"What frame of mind is he in?" Miss Featherpenny looked uncertainly at the heavy door to Andy's store room.

"Drunk," Blahrog informed her coldly.

It takes an enormous quantity of Throatduster to intoxicate a Felician. Intoxication is therefore considered bad form.

"And belligerent," the Minister of Finance added.

"Oh, dear." Miss Featherpenny looked at the door again. "But what can I do?" she asked in a helpless voice. "I'm not a promoter."

"He said," Blahrog indicated the door, "that you were a dumb steno."

"Well!" Hrom exclaimed.

Miss Featherpenny's hackles invisibly rose. Her mouth visibly tightened. She turned away from the door.

Hrom said, "You ought to try to show him."

Miss Featherpenny looked at them, and at the surrounding examples of Felician landscape and architecture.

"Mr. Blahrog," she said suddenly, "you don't mind looking like a leprechaun, do you? As long as you don't have to meet people?"

Blahrog's silence was more than dignified.

"What do you mean?" Hrom asked.

"You wouldn't mind if we used a picture of a Master Cobbler in the ad, would you?"

Blahrog thawed abruptly. "You have an idea?"

"If you don't mind the picture."

"He doesn't mind," Hrom said, adding in Felician, "After all, Papa, we don't have to let any ships but the freighters land."

"Go ahead, then," Blahrog consented.

"Good luck," Hrom added.

* * * * *

"You," Andy welcomed her. "Bah." He shut his eyes. Most of him was sprawled out on the floor.

"Yes, me," Miss Featherpenny agreed, repressing an inclination to kick him. She sat down on one of the kegs, and opened her stenographer's book. "I came to take down the ad for the shoes," she announced.

"What ad?" Andy moaned. "The newest, biggest, brightest ads can't get over an 0.62. How can I manage an 0.94? You're crazy." He opened his eyes. "But you do have nice legs."

"Felix II is sort of quaint," Miss Featherpenny suggested. "Why not use an old ad?"

"An idea," Andy enunciated, without hope.

"It's sort of pretty too," Miss Featherpenny nudged.

"We could use a color picture of it," Andy said, kicking thoughtfully at an overturned stool.

"The Felicians are quaint looking, too."

"Sure," Andy said. "Put a Felician in the foreground, cobbling." He tried to sit up.

"I've seen ads like that in history books," Miss Featherpenny said, exuding admiration.

"It's so old it's new," Andy said, lying down again. "Old English lettering over the top. A real cliché." He considered Miss Featherpenny's ankle. "Peaceful scenery, Felician shoes?"

"Not quite," said Miss Featherpenny.

"Quiet field, Felician shoes?"

"Nope," said Miss Featherpenny.

"You're an aggravating woman," Andy said sweetly, "but you do have nice legs."

"What about Elysian fields?" Miss Featherpenny suggested.

Andy tasted it. "Elysian fields, Felician shoes." He tried to sit up again. "You got all that down?" he demanded.

"Yes," Miss Featherpenny lied. She had it in her head, but not on the steno pad.

"Then get somebody to send it off so we can find out if it's good enough. And come back soon." He wobbled on his elbow. "You do have...."

"I think I'd better attend to sending it personally." Miss Featherpenny opened the door. "You rest until you feel better."

Blahrog had gone, but Hrom was waiting for her. She looked more like a Christmas fairy than usual. A mischievous one.

"Did you manage?" she whispered.

"Barely." Miss Featherpenny looked grim.

"Drink this," Hrom ordered, holding out a mug of Throatduster.

Miss Featherpenny was surprised. "I thought ladies didn't drink on Felix II."

"There are," Hrom said, "exceptions."

* * * * *

The next twelve days of waiting for computer results were not as hopefully active as the first twelve. The Felicians finished setting up their manufacturing and storing systems, but they didn't start making shoes. The cattle drovers forbore to slaughter the beasts who provided the leather.

The Everking and his Debators all developed severe cases of beard-itch, a Felician nervous disorder. Since it is even more unseemly to scratch on Felix II than it is on Earth, they retired temporarily from public life.

Andy also retired from public life, biting his fingernails, an Earther nervous disorder. Blahrog joined him in the illness, which was new to Felicians. By the time the answer from Planetary Promotions came it was the most fashionable habit on the planet, in spite of the fact that Felicians have extremely tough nails, and a pair of bony ridges rather

than true teeth.

The second message was also direct from Crumbly. It read: "Computer rates ad campaign at intensity 0.942. P. P. in action by the time you receive this. Stephens ordered back to Home Office; promoted to first class."

Four Earth months later, Miss Featherpenny entered Andy's ten by twelve office, her high heels clicking on the plastic tiles, and laid a memorandum on the new steel desk.

"They've been admitted," she announced.

"What? Who?" Andy said irritably. There were times when he thought her position as his private secretary had gone to her head.

"Felix II has been admitted to the Federation. The contract has been fulfilled." She smiled brightly. "Shall I mark the file closed?"

"Can't yet," Andy said. "Felix II won't be a permanent member of the Federation until they've been self-supporting for ten years."

"Why?" asked Miss Featherpenny.

"It's a precautionary measure," Andy began to explain. "Oh, let's go get some lunch and forget Felix II."

"Yes, Mr. Stephens," Miss Featherpenny said meekly.

He followed her out the door, admiring the effect of her plastic skirt. She did have nice legs....

* * * * *

Three years later, Edith Featherpenny was forced to remember Felix II. There was a communication on her mock-baroque desk. Felician shoes weren't selling. Felix II wasn't making enough money. The Galactic Federation was threatening to take steps.

She glanced at the impressive door to the inner office. Andy, she knew, was engaged in reading a letter from his brother Lloyd, who had just been promoted to vice-president of Universal Products.

She judiciously forged his initials on an order to put data on the

Felix II failure through the computer.

In an hour and a half she had the answer. The Felicians hadn't changed the styles, and their shoes didn't wear out. Everybody had a pair.

She considered the door again. There was really little sense in disturbing Andy over such a simple matter. She forged his name on a message to Blahrog. "Change the styles of your shoes."

She then picked up some carefully selected problem sheets from the top of the filing cabinet, and went through the impressive door.

The next morning, Blahrog's answer was on her desk.

"Felician shoes are of the cut most suited to the feet that wear them. To change them would be both foolish and unethical."

It was a good thing, Miss Featherpenny thought, that Andy was feeling better today. She went into his office, padding softly over the carpet to his contemporary prestwood desk.

"Good morning, Edie," Andy said cheerfully. "What happened? Lightning strike you?"

"Practically," Miss Featherpenny said. "It's Felix II again." She handed over the sheaf of papers.

"Why didn't you tell me about this yesterday?" Andy muttered, reading them.

"I thought I could handle it." Miss Featherpenny made a face. "Until I got that answer this morning."

"It sounds like typical Felician thinking," Andy said. "There's no sense trying to argue by mail." He sighed. "You'd better reserve a first-class passage for me on the first ship out."

"Can't I go?" Miss Featherpenny asked.

"Who'd run the office?"

"The stenos can stack stuff until we get back." Miss Featherpenny looked wistful. "I was in on the beginning of it. I want to see it through. Besides, I'd like to see Hrom again."

"Oh, all right," Andy agreed. "Make it two first class."

* * * * *

Blahrog was waiting on the long porch of the space port dining room.

"Have a nice trip?" he asked.

"What's all this about not changing the shoe styles?" Andy countered.

"As I told you in the message," Blahrog said impatiently, "We make our shoes in the best possible shapes for the feet that will wear them. There isn't any good reason to change them."

"You can't sell people two pairs of identical shoes," Andy insisted.

"You might be able to sell them if you changed them," Miss Featherpenny added, sounding reasonable.

"Save your arguments for the Everking," Blahrog said. "Come on to the car."

"Car?" Miss Featherpenny exclaimed. "The Everking's?"

"No, mine." Blahrog couldn't keep the pride out of his voice. "There are nearly two hundred cars on Felix II."

Andy went over the same ground in the presence of the Everking. It didn't help. The Everking, his minister and his Debators were solidly against changing the shoes. The ethics of the Cobblers' Guild were involved.

"If you won't follow Planetary Promotions' advice," he said at last, "the company can't be responsible for the outcome." He glared at the assembly. "In other words, the guarantee clause is cancelled."

There was an indignant and concerned buzz from the audience. Blahrog got up.

"Your Foreverness," he said, "honorable members of the government, Mr. Stephens. Three Earth years ago, Felix II gathered together all the money the government could find, and bought a contract with Planetary Promotions." He paused and shuffled his feet. "We did not expect the

contract to be fulfilled. We needed money, and two for one would keep us going while we attempted to educate the young to be immune to the tourists. Of course, if Planetary Promotions found a way for us to be self-supporting without tourists, we would be equally pleased."

"I thought so," Miss Featherpenny murmured.

"Really," Andy said. "Why didn't you let me in on it?"

Blahrog cleared his throat to indicate that he wasn't through. "Since a way was found," he continued, "Felician self respect and content has increased along with Felician prosperity." He glanced uneasily at Andy. "We would like to continue as we are going."

"Unless you change the styles," Andy said flatly, "that is impossible."

* * * * *

Miss Featherpenny, realizing that they were starting over the same ground, slipped out the door and walked over to visit Hrom.

"So Papa admitted it," Hrom said, after Miss Featherpenny had admired the baby, and been shown over the house. "I almost told you myself, when I first met you."

"You told me enough to let me guess the rest," Miss Featherpenny said.

"Have some olgan seed cakes," Hrom offered. "Why didn't you tell Mr. Stephens?"

Miss Featherpenny took a cake. "Partly because of his almighty attitude, and partly because I was on your.... Ow!" She clapped a hand hastily to her jaw.

"What's wrong?" Hrom asked, alarmed.

"Broke a tooth," Miss Featherpenny muttered, her face contorted.

"Does it hurt much?" Hrom's question was part sympathy and part curiosity.

Miss Featherpenny nodded. "I'll have to find a dentist right away."

"What's a dentist?"

"Man who fixes your teeth."

"But we don't have teeth," Hrom said.

"I forgot," Miss Featherpenny moaned. "Oh, Lord, I guess I'll have to go all the way back to Earth."

Hrom shook her head. "There are a lot of Earthers living on Darius IV. They must have a dentist. There's a ship every morning."

"Fine," Miss Featherpenny gasped.

"Can I get you something for the pain? Would an aspirtran help?"

"I'd better have two. Thanks."

"Here. Take the bottle with you." Hrom was frowning worriedly. "My, I'm glad we don't have teeth."

"I'll have to tell Andy--Mr. Stephens--that I'm leaving."

Inspiration dawned on Hrom's face. "I've hardly been out of the house since the baby was born. I'll leave him with my husband's mother and go with you."

"I'd be glad of the company," Miss Featherpenny admitted.

"Good. I'll find out what time the ship leaves, and tell Mother Klagom about the treat she's got coming. You go tell Mr. Stephens and then come back here for the night."

Miss Featherpenny heard them shouting before she opened the council chamber door.

"I suggest," Andy was saying, "that you either change the styles or go back to the tourist business."

She pushed the door open.

"Mr. Stephens," Blahrog said mildly, "the last time calamity was upon us, you solved the problem by drinking Throatduster until you got an idea. May I suggest that you try again?"

"Andy," Miss Featherpenny whispered.

"Well?" he snapped.

"I broke a tooth. I'm going over to Darius IV tomorrow, with Hrom, to have it fixed."

"Why Darius IV?" Andy demanded. "What's the matter with Felician dentists?"

"What's Hrom going to do with boy?" Blahrog demanded.

"Hrom's leaving the baby with Mrs. Klagom," Miss Featherpenny answered, "and there aren't any Felician dentists."

"Mrs. Klagom is a silly woman," Blahrog disapproved. "She would do better to leave him with me."

"If you must, I suppose you must," Andy admitted grudgingly. "Where are you going now?"

"Back to Hrom's house to lie down."

"Tell her I'll mind the baby," Blahrog called after her.

As she closed the door, she heard Andy say, "Gentlemen, if you'll supply the Throatduster, I'll give it a try."

* * * * *

"It's awfully quiet," Hrom said doubtfully, looking around at the Felician spaceport. "Look at the tannery chimneys. No smoke."

Miss Featherpenny, her mouth in good repair, glanced into the bar as they passed it. "Only two shippers," she said. "There are usually dozens."

"They must have stopped production entirely," Hrom said.

"Maybe Andy thought of something."

"I wonder if Papa brought the car down for us."

He hadn't. They walked into town.

Blahrog was in conference with the Everking.

"I'd better wait for him," Miss Featherpenny said. "I want to find out what's going on before I talk to Andy."

"I'd better rescue Mother Klagom from the baby."

Blahrog was as long-winded as usual.

"Where is Mr. Stephens?" Miss Featherpenny demanded, as soon as she saw him coming down the hall.

"In his old storeroom," Blahrog said moodily. "He's quite drunk, I believe, but he doesn't seem to be getting any ideas."

"Then why did you stop cobbling?"

Blahrog did a Felician shrug. "We're waiting to see what happens. There's no sense making shoes any more if they aren't wanted."

"I have to talk to him," Miss Featherpenny said.

"Do you have an idea?"

"No," Miss Featherpenny lied. "But you'd let him drink himself to death, if he didn't think of anything."

"You want a lift in the car?" Blahrog asked, uninsulted.

"I'd be pleased, if you don't mind. I just walked in from the port."

* * * * *

Andy was not, as Blahrog had suggested, very drunk. He was only hung over. "Get your tooth fixed?" he asked cheerlessly.

"Yes."

"Good dentist?"

Miss Featherpenny nodded. "He had some entirely new equipment. Extremely powerful, and quite precise."

"Oh?" Andy straightened in the old arm chair. "I've been trying to think. And drinking. Throatduster isn't working this time." He paused to reconsider. "Except that it makes me drunk. Everything keeps getting fuzzy, and my head is wider than my shoulders."

"The dentist said," Miss Featherpenny persisted, "that he could pull a whale's tooth as easily and smoothly as he pulled mine."

"You had to have it pulled? Too bad." Andy made a face at the full mug of Throatduster on the barrel beside him. "The Felicians won't change their minds about the shoes, and they won't try tourists again. I can't think of anything else. And they can claim the guarantee. I was bluffing."

"I know," Miss Featherpenny said. She tried again. "The dentist claims even the tiniest species could do dental work on the biggest species." She paused, hoping it would sink in. "Providing the tiny species had sufficient dexterity."

"Blasted Felicians," Andy muttered. "Stubborn little pigs."

"That's part of their trouble, I think," Miss Featherpenny said. "Being little, I mean. But it doesn't always work against them. When they're doing delicate work...."

"Like those shoes," Andy agreed. "'Best possible shapes already,'" he imitated Blahrog.

"They're one of the smallest intelligent species," Miss Featherpenny said in desperation. "And their manual dexterity rating is one of the highest. Why, a Felician could get both hands inside an Earther's mouth."

"And steal his fillings...." Andy started. "Wait a minute. You've given me an idea."

Miss Featherpenny breathed relief. "I have? What is it?"

"Dentists! They can all be dentists."

"All?"

"Well, enough of them to provide for the planet's income."

"Why, that's marvelous," Miss Featherpenny said. "It won't matter that other species think they're cute. Everybody takes dentists seriously."

"Their appearance will work for them," Andy said. "Think of children's dentistry."

"Let's go tell them right away," Miss Featherpenny said, feeling like a Bobbsey twin.

Andy swayed upward.

"Sit still," Miss Featherpenny commanded. "I'll bring you some coffee."

* * * * *

Blahrog accepted the suggestion with Felician phlegm and ministerial greed. "We'll have to change the tax system, since most of our working population will be living off-planet."

"Maybe you could work out a rotation system, Papa." Hrom had sneaked into the council chamber.

"Wait a minute," Andy said uneasily. "How are you going to educate these dentists?"

Blahrog stopped and thought. "We'll use the hotels for schools," he said slowly. His face wrinkled with sly pleasure. "And we can sell the coal surplus to pay teachers and buy equipment."

The Everking made a wicked-sounding comment in Felician.

The entire assembly burst into loud, beard-wagging laughter. It had a nasty ring to it.

"What did he say?" Andy demanded.

"He said," Hrom giggled, "'Let them try to treat us like stuffed toys now.'"

"Disgusting," said Miss Featherpenny.

"Indecent, Edie," Andy agreed. "But never mind. Let's go home and get married."

"You're a little sudden."

Andy grinned. "I'll have a raise coming for this, and I'd like to keep you in the family. I can't seem to think unless you're around."

"Took you long enough to notice," said Miss Featherpenny. But she didn't say it out loud.

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Transcriber's note

This story was published in _Fantastic Universe Science Fiction_, August-September 1953. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

An odd story, made up of oddly assorted elements that include a man, a woman, a black cat, a treasure--and an invisible being that had to be seen to be believed.

**all
cats
are
gray**

by Andrew North [Andre Alice Norton]

Under normal conditions a whole person has a decided advantage over a handicapped one. But out in deep space the normal may be reversed--for humans at any rate.

Steena of the spaceways--that sounds just like a corny title for one of the Stellar-Vedo spreads. I ought to know, I've tried my hand at writing enough of them. Only this Steena was no glamour babe. She was as colorless as a Lunar plant--even the hair netted down to her skull had a sort of grayish cast and I never saw her but once draped in anything but a shapeless and baggy gray space-all.

Steena was strictly background stuff and that is where she mostly spent her free hours--in the smelly smoky background corners of any stellar-port dive frequented by free spacers. If you really looked for her you could spot her--just sitting there listening to the talk--listening and remembering. She didn't open her own mouth often.

But when she did spacers had learned to listen. And the lucky few who heard her rare spoken words--these will never forget Steena.

She drifted from port to port. Being an expert operator on the big calculators she found jobs wherever she cared to stay for a time. And she came to be something like the master-minded machines she tended--smooth, gray, without much personality of her own.

But it was Steena who told Bub Nelson about the Jovan moon-rites--and her warning saved Bub's life six months later. It was Steena who identified the piece of stone Keene Clark was passing around a table one night, rightly calling it unworked Slitite. That started a rush which made ten fortunes overnight for men who were down to their last jets. And, last of all, she cracked the case of the _Empress of Mars_.

All the boys who had profited by her queer store of knowledge and her photographic memory tried at one time or another to balance the scales. But she wouldn't take so much as a cup of Canal water at their expense, let alone the credits they tried to push on her. Bub Nelson was the only one who got around her refusal. It was he who brought her Bat.

About a year after the Jovan affair he walked into the Free Fall one night and dumped Bat down on her table. Bat looked at Steena and growled. She looked calmly back at him and nodded once. From then on they traveled together--the thin gray woman and the big gray tom-cat. Bat learned to know the inside of more stellar bars than even most spacers visit in their lifetimes. He developed a liking for Vernal juice, drank it neat and quick, right out of a glass. And he was always at home on any table where Steena elected to drop him.

This is really the story of Steena, Bat, Cliff Moran and the _Empress of Mars_, a story which is already a legend of the spaceways. And it's a damn good story too. I ought to know, having framed the first version of it myself.

For I was there, right in the Rigel Royal, when it all began on the night that Cliff Moran blew in, looking lower than an antman's belly and twice as nasty. He'd had a spell of luck foul enough to twist a man into a slug-snake and we all knew that there was an attachment out for his ship. Cliff had fought his way up from the back courts of Venaport. Lose his ship and he'd slip back there--to rot. He was at the snarling stage that night when he picked out a table for himself and set out to drink away his troubles.

However, just as the first bottle arrived, so did a visitor. Steena came out of her corner, Bat curled around her shoulders stole-wise, his favorite mode of travel. She crossed over and dropped down without invitation at Cliff's side. That shook him out of his sulks. Because Steena never chose company when she could be alone. If one of the man-stones on Ganymede had come stumping in, it wouldn't have made more of us look out of the corners of our eyes.

She stretched out one long-fingered hand and set aside the bottle he had ordered and said only one thing, "It's about time for the _Empress of Mars_ to appear again."

Cliff scowled and bit his lip. He was tough, tough as jet lining--you have to be granite inside and out to struggle up from Venaport to a ship command. But we could guess what was running through his mind at that moment. The _Empress of Mars_ was just about the biggest prize a spacer could aim for. But in the fifty years she had been following her queer derelict orbit through space many men had tried to bring her in--and none had succeeded.

A pleasure-ship carrying untold wealth, she had been mysteriously abandoned in space by passengers and crew, none of whom had ever been seen or heard of again. At intervals thereafter she had been sighted, even boarded. Those who ventured into her either vanished or returned swiftly without any believable explanation of what they had seen--wanting only to get away from her as quickly as possible. But the man who could bring her in--or even strip her clean in space--that man would win the jackpot.

"All right!" Cliff slammed his fist down on the table. "I'll try even that!"

Steena looked at him, much as she must have looked at Bat the day Bub Nelson brought him to her, and nodded. That was all I saw. The rest of the story came to me in pieces, months later and in another port half the System away.

Cliff took off that night. He was afraid to risk waiting--with a writ out that could pull the ship from under him. And it wasn't until he was in space that he discovered his passengers--Steena and Bat. We'll never know what happened then. I'm betting that Steena made no explanation at all. She wouldn't.

It was the first time she had decided to cash in on her own tip and she

was there--that was all. Maybe that point weighed with Cliff, maybe he just didn't care. Anyway the three were together when they sighted the _Empress_ riding, her dead-lights gleaming, a ghost ship in night space.

She must have been an eerie sight because her other lights were on too, in addition to the red warnings at her nose. She seemed alive, a Flying Dutchman of space. Cliff worked his ship skillfully alongside and had no trouble in snapping magnetic lines to her lock. Some minutes later the three of them passed into her. There was still air in her cabins and corridors. Air that bore a faint corrupt taint which set Bat to sniffing greedily and could be picked up even by the less sensitive human nostrils.

Cliff headed straight for the control cabin but Steena and Bat went prowling. Closed doors were a challenge to both of them and Steena opened each as she passed, taking a quick look at what lay within. The fifth door opened on a room which no woman could leave without further investigation.

I don't know who had been housed there when the _Empress_ left port on her last lengthy cruise. Anyone really curious can check back on the old photo-reg cards. But there was a lavish display of silks trailing out of two travel kits on the floor, a dressing table crowded with crystal and jeweled containers, along with other lures for the female which drew Steena in. She was standing in front of the dressing table when she glanced into the mirror--glanced into it and froze.

Over her right shoulder she could see the spider-silk cover on the bed. Right in the middle of that sheer, gossamer expanse was a sparkling heap of gems, the dumped contents of some jewel case. Bat had jumped to the foot of the bed and flattened out as cats will, watching those gems, watching them and--something else!

Steena put out her hand blindly and caught up the nearest bottle. As she unstopped it she watched the mirrored bed. A gemmed bracelet rose from the pile, rose in the air and tinkled its siren song. It was as if an idle hand played.... Bat spat almost noiselessly. But he did not retreat. Bat had not yet decided his course.

She put down the bottle. Then she did something which perhaps few of the men she had listened to through the years could have done. She moved without hurry or sign of disturbance on a tour about the room. And, although she approached the bed she did not touch the jewels. She could not force herself to that. It took her five minutes to play out her

innocence and unconcern. Then it was Bat who decided the issue.

He leaped from the bed and escorted something to the door, remaining a careful distance behind. Then he mewed loudly twice. Steena followed him and opened the door wider.

Bat went straight on down the corridor, as intent as a hound on the warmest of scents. Steena strolled behind him, holding her pace to the unhurried gait of an explorer. What sped before them both was invisible to her but Bat was never baffled by it.

They must have gone into the control cabin almost on the heels of the unseen--if the unseen had heels, which there was good reason to doubt--for Bat crouched just within the doorway and refused to move on. Steena looked down the length of the instrument panels and officers' station-seats to where Cliff Moran worked. On the heavy carpet her boots made no sound and he did not glance up but sat humming through set teeth as he tested the tardy and reluctant responses to buttons which had not been pushed in years.

To human eyes they were alone in the cabin. But Bat still followed a moving something with his gaze. And it was something which he had at last made up his mind to distrust and dislike. For now he took a step or two forward and spat--his loathing made plain by every raised hair along his spine. And in that same moment Steena saw a flicker--a flicker of vague outline against Cliff's hunched shoulders as if the invisible one had crossed the space between them.

But why had it been revealed against Cliff and not against the back of one of the seats or against the panels, the walls of the corridor or the cover of the bed where it had reclined and played with its loot? What could Bat see?

The storehouse memory that had served Steena so well through the years clicked open a half-forgotten door. With one swift motion she tore loose her spaceall and flung the baggy garment across the back of the nearest seat.

Bat was snarling now, emitting the throaty rising cry that was his hunting song. But he was edging back, back toward Steena's feet, shrinking from something he could not fight but which he faced defiantly. If he could draw it after him, past that dangling spaceall.... He had to--it was their only chance.

"What the...." Cliff had come out of his seat and was staring at them.

What he saw must have been weird enough. Steena, bare-armed and shouldered, her usually stiffly-netted hair falling wildly down her back, Steena watching empty space with narrowed eyes and set mouth, calculating a single wild chance. Bat, crouched on his belly, retreating from thin air step by step and wailing like a demon.

"Toss me your blaster." Steena gave the order calmly--as if they still sat at their table in the Rigel Royal.

And as quietly Cliff obeyed. She caught the small weapon out of the air with a steady hand--caught and leveled it.

"Stay just where you are!" she warned. "Back, Bat, bring it back!"

With a last throat-splitting screech of rage and hate, Bat twisted to safety between her boots. She pressed with thumb and forefinger, firing at the spacealls. The material turned to powdery flakes of ash--except for certain bits which still flapped from the scorched seat--as if something had protected them from the force of the blast. Bat sprang straight up in the air with a scream that tore their ears.

"What...?" began Cliff again.

Steena made a warning motion with her left hand. "_Wait!_"

She was still tense, still watching Bat. The cat dashed madly around the cabin twice, running crazily with white-ringed eyes and flecks of foam on his muzzle. Then he stopped abruptly in the doorway, stopped and looked back over his shoulder for a long silent moment. He sniffed delicately.

Steena and Cliff could smell it too now, a thick oily stench which was not the usual odor left by an exploding blaster-shell.

Bat came back, treading daintily across the carpet, almost on the tips of his paws. He raised his head as he passed Steena and then he went confidently beyond to sniff, to sniff and spit twice at the unburned strips of the spaceall. Having thus paid his respects to the late enemy he sat down calmly and set to washing his fur with deliberation. Steena sighed once and dropped into the navigator's seat.

"Maybe now you'll tell me what in the hell's happened?" Cliff exploded

as he took the blaster out of her hand.

"Gray," she said dazedly, "it must have been gray--or I couldn't have seen it like that. I'm colorblind, you see. I can see only shades of gray--my whole world is gray. Like Bat's--his world is gray too--all gray. But he's been compensated for he can see above and below our range of color vibrations and--apparently--so can I!"

Her voice quavered and she raised her chin with a new air Cliff had never seen before--a sort of proud acceptance. She pushed back her wandering hair, but she made no move to imprison it under the heavy net again.

"That is why I saw the thing when it crossed between us. Against your spaceall it was another shade of gray--an outline. So I put out mine and waited for it to show against that--it was our only chance, Cliff.

"It was curious at first, I think, and it knew we couldn't see it--which is why it waited to attack. But when Bat's actions gave it away it moved. So I waited to see that flicker against the spaceall and then I let him have it. It's really very simple...."

Cliff laughed a bit shakily. "But what _was_ this gray thing? I don't get it."

"I think it was what made the _Empress_ a derelict. Something out of space, maybe, or from another world somewhere." She waved her hands. "It's invisible because it's a color beyond our range of sight. It must have stayed in here all these years. And it kills--it must--when its curiosity is satisfied." Swiftly she described the scene in the cabin and the strange behavior of the gem pile which had betrayed the creature to her.

Cliff did not return his blaster to its holder. "Any more of them on board, d'you think?" He didn't look pleased at the prospect.

Steena turned to Bat. He was paying particular attention to the space between two front toes in the process of a complete bath. "I don't think so. But Bat will tell us if there are. He can see them clearly, I believe."

But there weren't any more and two weeks later Cliff, Steena and Bat brought the _Empress_ into the Lunar quarantine station. And that is the

end of Steena's story because, as we have been told, happy marriages need no chronicles. And Steena had found someone who knew of her gray world and did not find it too hard to share with her--someone besides Bat. It turned out to be a real love match.

The last time I saw her she was wrapped in a flame-red cloak from the looms of Rigel and wore a fortune in Jovan rubies blazing on her wrists. Cliff was flipping a three-figure credit bill to a waiter. And Bat had a row of Vernal juice glasses set up before him. Just a little family party out on the town.

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of All Cats Are Gray, by Andre Alice Norton

THE SHADOWS ON THE WALL

From: The Project Gutenberg EBook of **The Wind in the Rose-bush and Other Stories of the Supernatural**, by Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman

"Henry had words with Edward in the study the night before Edward died," said Caroline Glynn.

She was elderly, tall, and harshly thin, with a hard colourlessness of face. She spoke not with acrimony, but with grave severity. Rebecca Ann Glynn, younger, stouter and rosy of face between her crinkling puffs of gray hair, gasped, by way of assent. She sat in a wide flounce of black silk in the corner of the sofa, and rolled terrified eyes from her sister Caroline to her sister Mrs. Stephen Brigham, who had been Emma Glynn, the one beauty of the family. She was beautiful still, with a large, splendid, full-blown beauty; she filled a great rocking-chair with her superb bulk of femininity, and swayed gently back and forth, her black silks whispering and her black frills fluttering. Even the shock of death (for her brother Edward lay dead in the house,) could not disturb her outward serenity of demeanour. She was grieved over the loss of her brother: he had been the youngest, and she had been fond of him, but never had Emma Brigham lost sight of her own importance amidst the waters of tribulation. She was always awake to the consciousness of her own stability in the midst of vicissitudes and the splendour of her permanent bearing.

But even her expression of masterly placidity changed before her sister Caroline's announcement and her sister Rebecca Ann's gasp of terror and distress in response.

"I think Henry might have controlled his temper, when poor Edward was so near his end," said she with an asperity which disturbed slightly the roseate curves of her beautiful mouth.

"Of course he did not KNOW," murmured Rebecca Ann in a faint tone strangely out of keeping with her appearance.

One involuntarily looked again to be sure that such a feeble pipe came from that full-swelling chest.

"Of course he did not know it," said Caroline quickly. She turned on her sister with a strange sharp look of suspicion. "How could he have known it?" said she. Then she shrank as if from the other's possible answer. "Of course you and I both know he could not," said she conclusively, but her pale face was paler than it had been before.

Rebecca gasped again. The married sister, Mrs. Emma Brigham, was now sitting up straight in her chair; she had ceased rocking, and was eyeing them both intently with a sudden accentuation of family likeness in her face. Given one common intensity of emotion and similar lines showed forth, and the three sisters of one race were evident.

"What do you mean?" said she impartially to them both. Then she, too, seemed to shrink before a possible answer. She even laughed an evasive sort of laugh. "I guess you don't mean anything," said she, but her face wore still the expression of shrinking horror.

"Nobody means anything," said Caroline firmly. She rose and crossed the room toward the door with grim decisiveness.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Brigham.

"I have something to see to," replied Caroline, and the others at once knew by her tone that she had some solemn and sad duty to perform in the chamber of death.

"Oh," said Mrs. Brigham.

After the door had closed behind Caroline, she turned to Rebecca.

"Did Henry have many words with him?" she asked.

"They were talking very loud," replied Rebecca evasively, yet with an answering gleam of ready response to the other's curiosity in the quick lift of her soft blue eyes.

Mrs. Brigham looked at her. She had not resumed rocking. She still sat up straight with a slight knitting of intensity on her fair forehead, between the pretty rippling curves of her auburn hair.

"Did you--hear anything?" she asked in a low voice with a glance toward the door.

"I was just across the hall in the south parlour, and that door was open and this door ajar," replied Rebecca with a slight flush.

"Then you must have--"

"I couldn't help it."

"Everything?"

"Most of it."

"What was it?"

"The old story."

"I suppose Henry was mad, as he always was, because Edward was living on here for nothing, when he had wasted all the money father left him."

Rebecca nodded with a fearful glance at the door.

When Emma spoke again her voice was still more hushed. "I know how he felt," said she. "He had always been so prudent himself, and worked hard at his profession, and there Edward had never done anything but spend, and it must have looked to him as if Edward was living at his expense, but he wasn't."

"No, he wasn't."

"It was the way father left the property--that all the children should have a home here--and he left money enough to buy the food and all if we had all come home."

"Yes."

"And Edward had a right here according to the terms of father's will, and Henry ought to have remembered it."

"Yes, he ought."

"Did he say hard things?"

"Pretty hard from what I heard."

"What?"

"I heard him tell Edward that he had no business here at all, and he thought he had better go away."

"What did Edward say?"

"That he would stay here as long as he lived and afterward, too, if he was a mind to, and he would like to see Henry get him out; and then--"

"What?"

"Then he laughed."

"What did Henry say."

"I didn't hear him say anything, but--"

"But what?"

"I saw him when he came out of this room."

"He looked mad?"

"You've seen him when he looked so."

Emma nodded; the expression of horror on her face had deepened.

"Do you remember that time he killed the cat because she had scratched him?"

"Yes. Don't!"

Then Caroline reentered the room. She went up to the stove in which a wood fire was burning--it was a cold, gloomy day of fall--and she warmed her hands, which were reddened from recent washing in cold water.

Mrs. Brigham looked at her and hesitated. She glanced at the door, which was still ajar, as it did not easily shut, being still swollen with the damp weather of the summer. She rose and pushed it together with a sharp thud which jarred the house. Rebecca started painfully with a half exclamation. Caroline looked at her disapprovingly.

"It is time you controlled your nerves, Rebecca," said she.

"I can't help it," replied Rebecca with almost a wail. "I am nervous. There's enough to make me so, the Lord knows."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Caroline with her old air of sharp suspicion, and something between challenge and dread of its being met.

Rebecca shrank.

"Nothing," said she.

"Then I wouldn't keep speaking in such a fashion."

Emma, returning from the closed door, said imperiously that it ought to be fixed, it shut so hard.

"It will shrink enough after we have had the fire a few days," replied Caroline. "If anything is done to it it will be too small; there will be a crack at the sill."

"I think Henry ought to be ashamed of himself for talking as he did to Edward," said Mrs. Bringham abruptly, but in an almost inaudible voice.

"Hush!" said Caroline, with a glance of actual fear at the closed door.

"Nobody can hear with the door shut."

"He must have heard it shut, and--"

"Well, I can say what I want to before he comes down, and I am not afraid of him."

"I don't know who is afraid of him! What reason is there for anybody to be afraid of Henry?" demanded Caroline.

Mrs. Bringham trembled before her sister's look. Rebecca gasped again. "There isn't any reason, of course. Why should there be?"

"I wouldn't speak so, then. Somebody might overhear you and think it was queer. Miranda Joy is in the south parlour sewing, you know."

"I thought she went upstairs to stitch on the machine."

"She did, but she has come down again."

"Well, she can't hear."

"I say again I think Henry ought to be ashamed of himself. I shouldn't think he'd ever get over it, having words with poor Edward the very night before he died. Edward was enough sight better disposition than Henry, with all his faults. I always thought a great deal of poor

Edward, myself."

Mrs. Bringham passed a large fluff of handkerchief across her eyes; Rebecca sobbed outright.

"Rebecca," said Caroline admonishingly, keeping her mouth stiff and swallowing determinately.

"I never heard him speak a cross word, unless he spoke cross to Henry that last night. I don't know, but he did from what Rebecca overheard," said Emma.

"Not so much cross as sort of soft, and sweet, and aggravating," sniffled Rebecca.

"He never raised his voice," said Caroline; "but he had his way."

"He had a right to in this case."

"Yes, he did."

"He had as much of a right here as Henry," sobbed Rebecca, "and now he's gone, and he will never be in this home that poor father left him and the rest of us again."

"What do you really think ailed Edward?" asked Emma in hardly more than a whisper. She did not look at her sister.

Caroline sat down in a nearby armchair, and clutched the arms convulsively until her thin knuckles whitened.

"I told you," said she.

Rebecca held her handkerchief over her mouth, and looked at them above it with terrified, streaming eyes.

"I know you said that he had terrible pains in his stomach, and had spasms, but what do you think made him have them?"

"Henry called it gastric trouble. You know Edward has always had dyspepsia."

Mrs. Bringham hesitated a moment. "Was there any talk of an--examination?" said she.

Then Caroline turned on her fiercely.

"No," said she in a terrible voice. "No."

The three sisters' souls seemed to meet on one common ground of terrified understanding though their eyes. The old-fashioned latch of the door was heard to rattle, and a push from without made the door shake ineffectually. "It's Henry," Rebecca sighed rather than whispered. Mrs. Brigham settled herself after a noiseless rush across the floor into her rocking-chair again, and was swaying back and forth with her head comfortably leaning back, when the door at last yielded and Henry Glynn entered. He cast a covertly sharp, comprehensive glance at Mrs. Brigham with her elaborate calm; at Rebecca quietly huddled in the corner of the sofa with her handkerchief to her face and only one small reddened ear as attentive as a dog's uncovered and revealing her alertness for his presence; at Caroline sitting with a strained composure in her armchair by the stove. She met his eyes quite firmly with a look of inscrutable fear, and defiance of the fear and of him.

Henry Glynn looked more like this sister than the others. Both had the same hard delicacy of form and feature, both were tall and almost emaciated, both had a sparse growth of gray blond hair far back from high intellectual foreheads, both had an almost noble aquilinity of feature. They confronted each other with the pitiless immovability of two statues in whose marble lineaments emotions were fixed for all eternity.

Then Henry Glynn smiled and the smile transformed his face. He looked suddenly years younger, and an almost boyish recklessness and irresolution appeared in his face. He flung himself into a chair with a gesture which was bewildering from its incongruity with his general appearance. He leaned his head back, flung one leg over the other, and looked laughingly at Mrs. Brigham.

"I declare, Emma, you grow younger every year," he said.

She flushed a little, and her placid mouth widened at the corners. She was susceptible to praise.

"Our thoughts to-day ought to belong to the one of us who will NEVER grow older," said Caroline in a hard voice.

Henry looked at her, still smiling. "Of course, we none of us forget that," said he, in a deep, gentle voice, "but we have to speak to the living, Caroline, and I have not seen Emma for a long time, and the living are as dear as the dead."

"Not to me," said Caroline.

She rose, and went abruptly out of the room again. Rebecca also rose and hurried after her, sobbing loudly.

Henry looked slowly after them.

"Caroline is completely unstrung," said he. Mrs. Brigham rocked. A confidence in him inspired by his manner was stealing over her. Out of that confidence she spoke quite easily and naturally.

"His death was very sudden," said she.

Henry's eyelids quivered slightly but his gaze was unswerving.

"Yes," said he; "it was very sudden. He was sick only a few hours."

"What did you call it?"

"Gastric."

"You did not think of an examination?"

"There was no need. I am perfectly certain as to the cause of his death."

Suddenly Mrs. Brigham felt a creep as of some live horror over her very soul. Her flesh prickled with cold, before an inflection of his voice. She rose, tottering on weak knees.

"Where are you going?" asked Henry in a strange, breathless voice.

Mrs. Brigham said something incoherent about some sewing which she had to do, some black for the funeral, and was out of the room. She went up to the front chamber which she occupied. Caroline was there. She went close to her and took her hands, and the two sisters looked at each other.

"Don't speak, don't, I won't have it!" said Caroline finally in an

awful whisper.

"I won't," replied Emma.

That afternoon the three sisters were in the study, the large front room on the ground floor across the hall from the south parlour, when the dusk deepened.

Mrs. Bringham was hemming some black material. She sat close to the west window for the waning light. At last she laid her work on her lap.

"It's no use, I cannot see to sew another stitch until we have a light," said she.

Caroline, who was writing some letters at the table, turned to Rebecca, in her usual place on the sofa.

"Rebecca, you had better get a lamp," she said.

Rebecca started up; even in the dusk her face showed her agitation.

"It doesn't seem to me that we need a lamp quite yet," she said in a piteous, pleading voice like a child's.

"Yes, we do," returned Mrs. Bringham peremptorily. "We must have a light. I must finish this to-night or I can't go to the funeral, and I can't see to sew another stitch."

"Caroline can see to write letters, and she is farther from the window than you are," said Rebecca.

"Are you trying to save kerosene or are you lazy, Rebecca Glynn?" cried Mrs. Bringham. "I can go and get the light myself, but I have this work all in my lap."

Caroline's pen stopped scratching.

"Rebecca, we must have the light," said she.

"Had we better have it in here?" asked Rebecca weakly.

"Of course! Why not?" cried Caroline sternly.

"I am sure I don't want to take my sewing into the other room, when it

is all cleaned up for to-morrow," said Mrs. Brigham.

"Why, I never heard such a to-do about lighting a lamp."

Rebecca rose and left the room. Presently she entered with a lamp--a large one with a white porcelain shade. She set it on a table, an old-fashioned card-table which was placed against the opposite wall from the window. That wall was clear of bookcases and books, which were only on three sides of the room. That opposite wall was taken up with three doors, the one small space being occupied by the table. Above the table on the old-fashioned paper, of a white satin gloss, traversed by an indeterminate green scroll, hung quite high a small gilt and black-framed ivory miniature taken in her girlhood of the mother of the family. When the lamp was set on the table beneath it, the tiny pretty face painted on the ivory seemed to gleam out with a look of intelligence.

"What have you put that lamp over there for?" asked Mrs. Brigham, with more of impatience than her voice usually revealed. "Why didn't you set it in the hall and have done with it. Neither Caroline nor I can see if it is on that table."

"I thought perhaps you would move," replied Rebecca hoarsely.

"If I do move, we can't both sit at that table. Caroline has her paper all spread around. Why don't you set the lamp on the study table in the middle of the room, then we can both see?"

Rebecca hesitated. Her face was very pale. She looked with an appeal that was fairly agonizing at her sister Caroline.

"Why don't you put the lamp on this table, as she says?" asked Caroline, almost fiercely. "Why do you act so, Rebecca?"

"I should think you WOULD ask her that," said Mrs. Brigham. "She doesn't act like herself at all."

Rebecca took the lamp and set it on the table in the middle of the room without another word. Then she turned her back upon it quickly and seated herself on the sofa, and placed a hand over her eyes as if to shade them, and remained so.

"Does the light hurt your eyes, and is that the reason why you didn't want the lamp?" asked Mrs. Brigham kindly.

"I always like to sit in the dark," replied Rebecca chokingly. Then she snatched her handkerchief hastily from her pocket and began to weep. Caroline continued to write, Mrs. Brigham to sew.

Suddenly Mrs. Brigham as she sewed glanced at the opposite wall. The glance became a steady stare. She looked intently, her work suspended in her hands. Then she looked away again and took a few more stitches, then she looked again, and again turned to her task. At last she laid her work in her lap and stared concentratedly. She looked from the wall around the room, taking note of the various objects; she looked at the wall long and intently. Then she turned to her sisters.

"What IS that?" said she.

"What?" asked Caroline harshly; her pen scratched loudly across the paper.

Rebecca gave one of her convulsive gasps.

"That strange shadow on the wall," replied Mrs. Brigham.

Rebecca sat with her face hidden: Caroline dipped her pen in the inkstand.

"Why don't you turn around and look?" asked Mrs. Brigham in a wondering and somewhat aggrieved way.

"I am in a hurry to finish this letter, if Mrs. Wilson Ebbit is going to get word in time to come to the funeral," replied Caroline shortly.

Mrs. Brigham rose, her work slipping to the floor, and she began walking around the room, moving various articles of furniture, with her eyes on the shadow.

Then suddenly she shrieked out:

"Look at this awful shadow! What is it? Caroline, look, look! Rebecca, look! WHAT IS IT?"

All Mrs. Brigham's triumphant placidity was gone. Her handsome face was livid with horror. She stood stiffly pointing at the shadow.

"Look!" said she, pointing her finger at it. "Look! What is it?"

Then Rebecca burst out in a wild wail after a shuddering glance at the wall:

"Oh, Caroline, there it is again! There it is again!"

"Caroline Glynn, you look!" said Mrs. Brigham. "Look! What is that dreadful shadow?"

Caroline rose, turned, and stood confronting the wall.

"How should I know?" she said.

"It has been there every night since he died," cried Rebecca.

"Every night?"

"Yes. He died Thursday and this is Saturday; that makes three nights," said Caroline rigidly. She stood as if holding herself calm with a vise of concentrated will.

"It--it looks like--like--" stammered Mrs. Brigham in a tone of intense horror.

"I know what it looks like well enough," said Caroline. "I've got eyes in my head."

"It looks like Edward," burst out Rebecca in a sort of frenzy of fear. "Only--"

"Yes, it does," assented Mrs. Brigham, whose horror-stricken tone matched her sister's, "only-- Oh, it is awful! What is it, Caroline?"

"I ask you again, how should I know?" replied Caroline. "I see it there like you. How should I know any more than you?"

"It MUST be something in the room," said Mrs. Brigham, staring wildly around.

"We moved everything in the room the first night it came," said Rebecca; "it is not anything in the room."

Caroline turned upon her with a sort of fury. "Of course it is something in the room," said she. "How you act! What do you mean by

talking so? Of course it is something in the room."

"Of course, it is," agreed Mrs. Brigham, looking at Caroline suspiciously. "Of course it must be. It is only a coincidence. It just happens so. Perhaps it is that fold of the window curtain that makes it. It must be something in the room."

"It is not anything in the room," repeated Rebecca with obstinate horror.

The door opened suddenly and Henry Glynn entered. He began to speak, then his eyes followed the direction of the others'. He stood stock still staring at the shadow on the wall. It was life size and stretched across the white parallelogram of a door, half across the wall space on which the picture hung.

"What is that?" he demanded in a strange voice.

"It must be due to something in the room," Mrs. Brigham said faintly.

"It is not due to anything in the room," said Rebecca again with the shrill insistency of terror.

"How you act, Rebecca Glynn," said Caroline.

Henry Glynn stood and stared a moment longer. His face showed a gamut of emotions--horror, conviction, then furious incredulity. Suddenly he began hastening hither and thither about the room. He moved the furniture with fierce jerks, turning ever to see the effect upon the shadow on the wall. Not a line of its terrible outlines wavered.

"It must be something in the room!" he declared in a voice which seemed to snap like a lash.

His face changed. The inmost secrecy of his nature seemed evident until one almost lost sight of his lineaments. Rebecca stood close to her sofa, regarding him with woeful, fascinated eyes. Mrs. Brigham clutched Caroline's hand. They both stood in a corner out of his way. For a few moments he raged about the room like a caged wild animal. He moved every piece of furniture; when the moving of a piece did not affect the shadow, he flung it to the floor, the sisters watching.

Then suddenly he desisted. He laughed and began straightening the furniture which he had flung down.

"What an absurdity," he said easily. "Such a to-do about a shadow."

"That's so," assented Mrs. Brigham, in a scared voice which she tried to make natural. As she spoke she lifted a chair near her.

"I think you have broken the chair that Edward was so fond of," said Caroline.

Terror and wrath were struggling for expression on her face. Her mouth was set, her eyes shrinking. Henry lifted the chair with a show of anxiety.

"Just as good as ever," he said pleasantly. He laughed again, looking at his sisters. "Did I scare you?" he said. "I should think you might be used to me by this time. You know my way of wanting to leap to the bottom of a mystery, and that shadow does look--queer, like--and I thought if there was any way of accounting for it I would like to without any delay."

"You don't seem to have succeeded," remarked Caroline dryly, with a slight glance at the wall.

Henry's eyes followed hers and he quivered perceptibly.

"Oh, there is no accounting for shadows," he said, and he laughed again. "A man is a fool to try to account for shadows."

Then the supper bell rang, and they all left the room, but Henry kept his back to the wall, as did, indeed, the others.

Mrs. Brigham pressed close to Caroline as she crossed the hall. "He looked like a demon!" she breathed in her ear.

Henry led the way with an alert motion like a boy; Rebecca brought up the rear; she could scarcely walk, her knees trembled so.

"I can't sit in that room again this evening," she whispered to Caroline after supper.

"Very well, we will sit in the south room," replied Caroline. "I think we will sit in the south parlour," she said aloud; "it isn't as damp as the study, and I have a cold."

So they all sat in the south room with their sewing. Henry read the newspaper, his chair drawn close to the lamp on the table. About nine o'clock he rose abruptly and crossed the hall to the study. The three sisters looked at one another. Mrs. Brigham rose, folded her rustling skirts compactly around her, and began tiptoeing toward the door.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Rebecca agitatedly.

"I am going to see what he is about," replied Mrs. Brigham cautiously.

She pointed as she spoke to the study door across the hall; it was ajar. Henry had striven to pull it together behind him, but it had somehow swollen beyond the limit with curious speed. It was still ajar and a streak of light showed from top to bottom. The hall lamp was not lit.

"You had better stay where you are," said Caroline with guarded sharpness.

"I am going to see," repeated Mrs. Brigham firmly.

Then she folded her skirts so tightly that her bulk with its swelling curves was revealed in a black silk sheath, and she went with a slow toddle across the hall to the study door. She stood there, her eye at the crack.

In the south room Rebecca stopped sewing and sat watching with dilated eyes. Caroline sewed steadily. What Mrs. Brigham, standing at the crack in the study door, saw was this:

Henry Glynn, evidently reasoning that the source of the strange shadow must be between the table on which the lamp stood and the wall, was making systematic passes and thrusts all over and through the intervening space with an old sword which had belonged to his father. Not an inch was left unpierced. He seemed to have divided the space into mathematical sections. He brandished the sword with a sort of cold fury and calculation; the blade gave out flashes of light, the shadow remained unmoved. Mrs. Brigham, watching, felt herself cold with horror.

Finally Henry ceased and stood with the sword in hand and raised as if to strike, surveying the shadow on the wall threateningly. Mrs. Brigham toddled back across the hall and shut the south room door behind her before she related what she had seen.

"He looked like a demon!" she said again. "Have you got any of that old wine in the house, Caroline? I don't feel as if I could stand much more."

Indeed, she looked overcome. Her handsome placid face was worn and strained and pale.

"Yes, there's plenty," said Caroline; "you can have some when you go to bed."

"I think we had all better take some," said Mrs. Brigham. "Oh, my God, Caroline, what--"

"Don't ask and don't speak," said Caroline.

"No, I am not going to," replied Mrs. Brigham; "but--"

Rebecca moaned aloud.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Caroline harshly.

"Poor Edward," returned Rebecca.

"That is all you have to groan for," said Caroline. "There is nothing else."

"I am going to bed," said Mrs. Brigham. "I sha'n't be able to be at the funeral if I don't."

Soon the three sisters went to their chambers and the south parlour was deserted. Caroline called to Henry in the study to put out the light before he came upstairs. They had been gone about an hour when he came into the room bringing the lamp which had stood in the study. He set it on the table and waited a few minutes, pacing up and down. His face was terrible, his fair complexion showed livid; his blue eyes seemed dark blanks of awful reflections.

Then he took the lamp up and returned to the library. He set the lamp on the centre table, and the shadow sprang out on the wall. Again he studied the furniture and moved it about, but deliberately, with none of his former frenzy. Nothing affected the shadow. Then he returned to the south room with the lamp and again waited. Again he returned to the study and placed the lamp on the table, and the shadow sprang out

upon the wall. It was midnight before he went upstairs. Mrs. Brigham and the other sisters, who could not sleep, heard him.

The next day was the funeral. That evening the family sat in the south room. Some relatives were with them. Nobody entered the study until Henry carried a lamp in there after the others had retired for the night. He saw again the shadow on the wall leap to an awful life before the light.

The next morning at breakfast Henry Glynn announced that he had to go to the city for three days. The sisters looked at him with surprise. He very seldom left home, and just now his practice had been neglected on account of Edward's death. He was a physician.

"How can you leave your patients now?" asked Mrs. Brigham wonderingly.

"I don't know how to, but there is no other way," replied Henry easily. "I have had a telegram from Doctor Mitford."

"Consultation?" inquired Mrs. Brigham.

"I have business," replied Henry.

Doctor Mitford was an old classmate of his who lived in a neighbouring city and who occasionally called upon him in the case of a consultation.

After he had gone Mrs. Brigham said to Caroline that after all Henry had not said that he was going to consult with Doctor Mitford, and she thought it very strange.

"Everything is very strange," said Rebecca with a shudder.

"What do you mean?" inquired Caroline sharply.

"Nothing," replied Rebecca.

Nobody entered the library that day, nor the next, nor the next. The third day Henry was expected home, but he did not arrive and the last train from the city had come.

"I call it pretty queer work," said Mrs. Brigham. "The idea of a doctor leaving his patients for three days anyhow, at such a time as this, and I know he has some very sick ones; he said so. And the idea of a consultation lasting three days! There is no sense in it, and NOW

he has not come. I don't understand it, for my part."

"I don't either," said Rebecca.

They were all in the south parlour. There was no light in the study opposite, and the door was ajar.

Presently Mrs. Bringham rose--she could not have told why; something seemed to impel her, some will outside her own. She went out of the room, again wrapping her rustling skirts around that she might pass noiselessly, and began pushing at the swollen door of the study.

"She has not got any lamp," said Rebecca in a shaking voice.

Caroline, who was writing letters, rose again, took a lamp (there were two in the room) and followed her sister. Rebecca had risen, but she stood trembling, not venturing to follow.

The doorbell rang, but the others did not hear it; it was on the south door on the other side of the house from the study. Rebecca, after hesitating until the bell rang the second time, went to the door; she remembered that the servant was out.

Caroline and her sister Emma entered the study. Caroline set the lamp on the table. They looked at the wall. "Oh, my God," gasped Mrs. Bringham, "there are--there are TWO--shadows." The sisters stood clutching each other, staring at the awful things on the wall. Then Rebecca came in, staggering, with a telegram in her hand. "Here is--a telegram," she gasped. "Henry is--dead."

CREATURES OF THE LIGHT

By Sophie Wenzel Ellis

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He had striven to perfect the faultless man of the future, and had succeeded--too well. For in the pitilessly cold eyes of Adam, his super-human creation, Dr. Mundson saw only contempt--and annihilation--for the human race.

In a night club of many lights and much high-pitched laughter, where he had come for an hour of forgetfulness and an execrable dinner, John Northwood was suddenly conscious that Fate had begun shuffling the cards of his destiny for a dramatic game.

First, he was aware that the singularly ugly and deformed man at the next table was gazing at him with an intense, almost excited scrutiny. But, more disturbing than this, was the scowl of hate on the face of another man, as handsome as this other was hideous, who sat in a far corner hidden behind a broad column, with rude elbows on the table, gawking first at Northwood and then at the deformed, almost hideous man.

[Illustration: _The projector, belching forth its stinking breath of corruption, swung in a mad arc over the ceiling, over the walls._]

Northwood's blood chilled over the expression on the handsome, fair-haired stranger's perfectly carved face. If a figure in marble could display a fierce, unnatural passion, it would seem no more eldritch than the hate in the icy blue eyes.

It was not a new experience for Northwood to be stared at: he was not merely a good-looking young fellow of twenty-five, he was scenery, magnificent and compelling. Furthermore, he had been in the public eye for years, first as a precocious child and, later, as a brilliant young scientist. Yet, for all his experience with hero worshippers to put an adamantine crust on his sensibilities, he grew warm-eared under the gaze of these two strangers--this hunchback with a face like a grotesque mask in a Greek play, this other who, even handsomer than himself, chilled the blood queerly with the cold perfection of his godlike masculine beauty.

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Northwood sensed something familiar about the hunchback. Somewhere he had seen that huge, round, intelligent face splattered with startling features. The very breadth of the man's massive brow was not altogether unknown to him, nor could Northwood look into the mournful, near-sighted black eyes without trying to recall when and where he had last seen them.

But this other of the marble-perfect nose and jaw, the blond, thick-waved hair, was totally a stranger, whom Northwood fervently hoped he would never know too well.

Trying to analyze the queer repugnance that he felt for this handsome, boldly staring fellow, Northwood decided: "He's like a newly-made wax figure endowed with life."

Shivering over his own fantastic thought, he again glanced swiftly at the hunchback, who he noticed was playing with his coffee, evidently to prolong the meal.

One year of calm-headed scientific teaching in a famous old eastern university had not made him callous to mysteries. Thus, with a feeling of high adventure, he finished his supper and prepared to go. From the corner of his eye, he saw the hunchback leave his seat, while the handsome man behind the column rose furtively, as though he, too, intended to follow.

Northwood was out in the dusky street about thirty seconds, when the hunchback came from the foyer. Without apparently noticing Northwood, he hailed a taxi. For a moment, he stood still, waiting for the taxi to pull up at the curb. Standing thus, with the street light limning every unnatural angle of his twisted body and every queer abnormality of his huge features, he looked almost repulsive.

On his way to the taxi, his thick shoulder jostled the younger man. Northwood felt something strike his foot, and, stooping in the crowded street, picked up a black leather wallet.

"Wait!" he shouted as the hunchback stepped into the waiting taxi.

But the man did not falter. In a moment, Northwood lost sight of him as the taxi moved away.

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He debated with himself whether or not he should attempt to follow. And while he stood thus in indecision, the handsome stranger approached him.

"Good evening to you," he said curtly. His rich, musical voice, for all its deepness, held a faint hint of the tremulous, birdlike notes heard in the voice of a young child who has not used his vocal chords long enough for them to have lost their exquisite newness.

"Good evening," echoed Northwood, somewhat uncertainly. A sudden aura of repulsion swept coldly over him. Seen close, with the brilliant light of the street directly on his too perfect face, the man was more sinister than in the café. Yet Northwood, struggling desperately for a reason to explain his violent dislike, could not discover why he shrank from this splendid creature, whose eyes and flesh had a new, fresh appearance rarely seen except in very young boys.

"I want what you picked up," went on the stranger.

"It isn't yours!" Northwood flashed back. Ah! that effluvium of hatred which seemed to weave a tangible net around him!

"Nor is it yours. Give it to me!"

"You're insolent, aren't you?"

"If you don't give it to me, you will be sorry." The man did not raise his voice in anger, yet the words whipped Northwood with almost physical violence. "If he knew that I saw everything that happened in there--that I am talking to you at this moment--he would tremble with fear."

"But you can't intimidate me."

"No?" For a long moment, the cold blue eyes held his contemptuously.

"No? I can't frighten you--you worm of the Black Age?"

Before Northwood's horrified sight, he vanished; vanished as though he had turned suddenly to air and floated away.

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The street was not crowded at that time, and there was no pressing group of bodies to hide the splendid creature. Northwood gawked stupidly, mouth half open, eyes searching wildly everywhere. The man was gone. He

had simply disappeared, in this sane, electric-lighted street.

Suddenly, close to Northwood's ear, grated a derisive laugh. "I can't frighten you?" From nowhere came that singularly young-old voice.

As Northwood jerked his head around to meet blank space, a blow struck the corner of his mouth. He felt the warm blood run over his chin.

"I could take that wallet from you, worm, but you may keep it, and see me later. But remember this--the thing inside never will be yours."

The words fell from empty air.

For several minutes, Northwood waited at the spot, expecting another demonstration of the abnormal, but nothing else occurred. At last, trembling violently, he wiped the thick moisture from his forehead and dabbed at the blood which he still felt on his chin.

But when he looked at his handkerchief, he muttered:

"Well, I'll be jiggered!"

The handkerchief bore not the slightest trace of blood.

* * * * *

Under the light in his bedroom, Northwood examined the wallet. It was made of alligator skin, clasped with a gold signet that bore the initial M. The first pocket was empty; the second yielded an object that sent a warm flush to his face.

It was the photograph of a gloriously beautiful girl, so seductively lovely that the picture seemed almost to be alive. The short, curved upper lip, the full, delicately voluptuous lower, parted slightly in a smile that seemed to linger in every exquisite line of her face. She looked as though she had just spoken passionately, and the spirit of her words had inspired her sweet flesh and eyes.

Northwood turned his head abruptly and groaned, "Good Heavens!"

He had no right to palpitate over the picture of an unknown beauty. Only a month ago, he had become engaged to a young woman whose mind was as brilliant as her face was plain. Always he had vowed that he would never marry a pretty girl, for he detested his own masculine beauty sincerely.

He tried to grasp a mental picture of Mary Burns, who had never stirred in him the emotion that this smiling picture invoked. But, gazing at the picture, he could not remember how his fiancée looked.

Suddenly the picture fell from his fingers and dropped to the floor on its face, revealing an inscription on the back. In a bold, masculine hand, he read: "Your future wife."

"Some lucky fellow is headed for a life of bliss," was his jealous thought.

He frowned at the beautiful face. What was this girl to that hideous hunchback? Why did the handsome stranger warn him, "_The thing inside never will be yours_"?

Again he turned eagerly to the wallet.

In the last flap he found something that gave him another surprise: a plain white card on which a name and address were written by the same hand that had penned the inscription on the picture.

Emil Mundson, Ph. D.,
44-1/2 Indian Court

Emil Mundson, the electrical wizard and distinguished scientific writer, friend of the professor of science at the university where Northwood was an assistant professor; Emil Mundson, whom, a week ago, Northwood had yearned mightily to meet.

Now Northwood knew why the hunchback's intelligent, ugly face was familiar to him. He had seen it pictured as often as enterprising news photographers could steal a likeness from the over-sensitive scientist, who would never sit for a formal portrait.

* * * * *

Even before Northwood had graduated from the university where he now taught, he had been avidly interested in Emil Mundson's fantastic articles in scientific journals. Only a week ago, Professor Michael had come to him with the current issue of New Science, shouting excitedly:

"Did you read this, John, this article by Emil Mundson?" His shaking, gnarled old fingers tapped the open magazine.

Northwood seized the magazine and looked avidly at the title of the article, "Creatures of the Light."

"No, I haven't read it," he admitted. "My magazine hasn't come yet."

"Run through it now briefly, will you? And note with especial care the passages I have marked. In fact, you needn't bother with anything else just now. Read this--and this--and this." He pointed out penciled paragraphs.

Northwood read:

Man always has been, always will be a creature of the light. He is forever reaching for some future point of perfected evolution which, even when his most remote ancestor was a fish creature composed of a few cells, was the guiding power that brought him up from the first stinking sea and caused him to create gods in his own image.

It is this yearning for perfection which sets man apart from all other life, which made him _man_ even in the rudimentary stages of his development. He was man when he wallowed in the slime of the new world and yearned for the air above. He will still be man when he has evolved into that glorious creature of the future whose body is deathless and whose mind rules the universe.

Professor Michael, looking over Northwood's shoulder, interrupted the reading:

"_Man always has been man_," he droned emphatically. "That's not original with friend Mundson, of course; yet it is a theory that has not received sufficient investigation." He indicated another marked paragraph. "Read this thoughtfully, John. It's the crux of Mundson's thought."

Northwood continued:

Since the human body is chemical and electrical, increased knowledge of its powers and limitations will enable us to work with Nature in her sublime but infinitely slow processes of human evolution. We need not wait another fifty thousand years to be godlike creatures. Perhaps even now we may be standing at

the beginning of the splendid bridge that will take us to that state of perfected evolution when we shall be Creatures who have reached the Light.

Northwood looked questioningly at the professor. "Queer, fantastic thing, isn't it?"

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Professor Michael smoothed his thin, gray hair with his dried-out hand. "Fantastic?" His intellectual eyes behind the thick glasses sought the ceiling. "Who can say? Haven't you ever wondered why all parents expect their children to be nearer perfection than themselves, and why is it a natural impulse for them to be willing to sacrifice themselves to better their offspring?" He paused and moistened his pale, wrinkled lips. "Instinct, Northwood. We Creatures of the Light know that our race shall reach that point in evolution when, as perfect creatures, we shall rule all matter and live forever." He punctuated the last words with blows on the table.

Northwood laughed dryly. "How many thousands of years are you looking forward, Professor?"

The professor made an obscure noise that sounded like a smothered sniff. "You and I shall never agree on the point that mental advancement may wipe out physical limitations in the human race, perhaps in a few hundred years. It seems as though your profound admiration for Dr. Mundson would win you over to this pet theory."

"But what sane man can believe that even perfectly developed beings, through mental control, could overcome Nature's fixed laws?"

"We don't know! We don't know!" The professor slapped the magazine with an emphatic hand. "Emil Mundson hasn't written this article for nothing. He's paving the way for some announcement that will startle the scientific world. I know him. In the same manner he gave out veiled hints of his various brilliant discoveries and inventions long before he offered them to the world."

"But Dr. Mundson is an electrical wizard. He would not be delving seriously into the mysteries of evolution, would he?"

"Why not?" The professor's wizened face screwed up wisely. "A year ago, when he was back from one of those mysterious long excursions he takes

in that weirdly different aircraft of his, about which he is so secretive, he told me that he was conducting experiments to prove his belief that the human brain generates electric current, and that the electrical impulses in the brain set up radioactive waves that some day, among other miracles, will make thought communication possible. Perfect man, he says, will perform mental feats which will give him complete mental domination over the physical."

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Northwood finished reading and turned thoughtfully to the window. His profile in repose had the straight-nosed, full-lipped perfection of a Greek coin. Old, wizened Professor Michael, gazing at him covertly, smothered a sigh.

"I wish you knew Dr. Mundson," he said. "He, the ugliest man in the world, delights in physical perfection. He would revel in your splendid body and brilliant mind."

Northwood blushed hotly. "You'll have to arrange a meeting between us."

"I have." The professor's thin, dry lips pursed comically. "He'll drop in to see you within a few days."

And now John Northwood sat holding Dr. Mundson's card and the wallet which the scientist had so mysteriously dropped at his feet.

* * * * *

Here was high adventure, perhaps, for which he had been singled out by the famous electrical wizard. While excitement mounted in his blood, Northwood again examined the photograph. The girl's strange eyes, odd in expression rather than in size or shape, seemed to hold him. The young man's breath came quicker.

"It's a challenge," he said softly. "It won't hurt to see what it's all about."

His watch showed eleven o'clock. He would return the wallet that night. Into his coat pocket he slipped a revolver. One sometimes needed weapons in Indian Court.

He took a taxi, which soon turned from the well-lighted streets into a section where squalid houses crowded against each other, and dirty

children swarmed in the streets in their last games of the day.

Indian Court was little more than an alley, dark and evil smelling.

The chauffeur stopped at the entrance and said:

"If I drive in, I'll have to back out, sir. Number forty-four and a half is the end house, facing the entrance."

"You've been here before?" asked Northwood.

"Last week I drove the queerest bird here--a fellow as good-looking as you, who had me follow the taxi occupied by a hunchback with a face like Old Nick." The man hesitated and went on haltingly: "It might sound goofy, mister, but there was something funny about my fare. He jumped out, asked me the charge, and, in the moment I glanced at my taxi-meter, he disappeared. Yes, sir. Vanished, owing me four dollars, six bits. It was almost ghostlike, mister."

Northwood laughed nervously and dismissed him. He found his number and knocked at the dilapidated door. He heard a sudden movement in the lighted room beyond, and the door opened quickly.

Dr. Mundson faced him.

"I knew you'd come!" he said with a slight Teutonic accent. "Often I'm not wrong in sizing up my man. Come in."

Northwood cleared his throat awkwardly. "You dropped your wallet at my feet, Dr. Mundson. I tried to stop you before you got away, but I guess you did not hear me."

He offered the wallet, but the hunchback waved it aside.

"A ruse, of course," he confessed. "It just was my way of testing what your Professor Michael told about you--that you are extraordinarily intelligent, virile, and imaginative. Had you sent the wallet to me, I should have sought elsewhere for my man. Come in."

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Northwood followed him into a living room evidently recently furnished in a somewhat hurried manner. The furniture, although rich, was not placed to best advantage. The new rug was a trifle crooked on the floor,

and the lamp shades clashed in color with the other furnishings.

Dr. Mundson's intense eyes swept over Northwood's tall, slim body.

"Ah, you're a man!" he said softly. "You are what all men would be if we followed Nature's plan that only the fit shall survive. But modern science is permitting the unfit to live and to mix their defective beings with the developing race!" His huge fist gesticulated madly. "Fools! Fools! They need me and perfect men like you."

"Why?"

"Because you can help me in my plan to populate the earth with a new race of godlike people. But don't question me too closely now. Even if I should explain, you would call me insane. But watch; gradually I shall unfold the mystery before you, so that you will believe."

He reached for the wallet that Northwood still held, opened it with a monstrous hand, and reached for the photograph. "She shall bring you love. She's more beautiful than a poet's dream."

A warm flush crept over the young man's face.

"I can easily understand," he said, "how a man could love her, but for me she comes too late."

"Pooh! Fiddlesticks!" The scientist snapped his fingers. "This girl was created for you. That other--you will forget her the moment you set eyes on the sweet flesh of this Athalia. She is an houri from Paradise--a maiden of musk and incense." He held the girl's photograph toward the young man. "Keep it. She is yours, if you are strong enough to hold her."

Northwood opened his card case and placed the picture inside, facing Mary's photograph. Again the warning words of the mysterious stranger rang in his memory: "_The thing inside never will be yours._"

"Where to," he said eagerly; "and when do we start?"

"To the new Garden of Eden," said the scientist, with such a beatific smile that his face was less hideous. "We start immediately. I have arranged with Professor Michael for you to go."

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Northwood followed Dr. Mundson to the street and walked with him a few blocks to a garage where the scientist's motor car waited.

"The apartment in Indian Court is just a little eccentricity of mine," explained Dr. Mundson. "I need people in my work, people whom I must select through swift, sure tests. The apartment comes in handy, as to-night."

Northwood scarcely noted where they were going, or how long they had been on the way. He was vaguely aware that they had left the city behind, and were now passing through farms bathed in moonlight.

At last they entered a path that led through a bit of woodland. For half a mile the path continued, and then ended at a small, enclosed field. In the middle of this rested a queer aircraft. Northwood knew it was a flying machine only by the propellers mounted on the top of the huge ball-shaped body. There were no wings, no birdlike hull, no tail.

"It looks almost like a little world ready to fly off into space," he commented.

"It is just about that." The scientist's squat, bunched-out body, settled squarely on long, thin, straddled legs, looked gnomelike in the moonlight. "One cannot copy flesh with steel and wood, but one can make metal perform magic of which flesh is not capable. My sun-ship is not a mechanical reproduction of a bird. It is--but, climb in, young friend."

* * * * *

Northwood followed Dr. Mundson into the aircraft. The moment the scientist closed the metal door behind them, Northwood was instantly aware of some concealed horror that vibrated through his nerves. For one dreadful moment, he expected some terrific agent of the shadows that escaped the electric lights to leap upon him. And this was odd, for nothing could be saner than the globular interior of the aircraft, divided into four wedge-shaped apartments.

Dr. Mundson also paused at the door, puzzled, hesitant.

"Someone has been here!" he exclaimed. "Look, Northwood! The bunk has been occupied--the one in this cabin I had set aside for you."

He pointed to the disarranged bunk, where the impression of a head could

still be seen on a pillow.

"A tramp, perhaps."

"No! The door was locked, and, as you saw, the fence around this field was protected with barbed wire. There's something wrong. I felt it on my trip here all the way, like someone watching me in the dark. And don't laugh! I have stopped laughing at all things that seem unnatural. You don't know what is natural."

Northwood shivered. "Maybe someone is concealed about the ship."

"Impossible. Me, I thought so, too. But I looked and looked, and there was nothing."

All evening Northwood had burned to tell the scientist about the handsome stranger in the Mad Hatter Club. But even now he shrank from saying that a man had vanished before his eyes.

Dr. Mundson was working with a succession of buttons and levers. There was a slight jerk, and then the strange craft shot up, straight as a bullet from a gun, with scarcely a sound other than a continuous whistle.

"The vertical rising aircraft perfected," explained Dr. Mundson. "But what would you think if I told you that there is not an ounce of gasoline in my heavier-than-air craft?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. An electrical genius would seek for a less obsolete source of power."

* * * * *

In the bright flare of the electric lights, the scientist's ugly face flushed. "The man who harnesses the sun rules the world. He can make the desert places bloom, the frozen poles balmy and verdant. You, John Northwood, are one of the very few to fly in a machine operated solely by electrical energy from the sun's rays."

"Are you telling me that this airship is operated with power from the sun?"

"Yes. And I cannot take the credit for its invention." He sighed. "The dream was mine, but a greater brain developed it--a brain that may be

greater than I suspect." His face grew suddenly graver.

A little later Northwood said: "It seems that we must be making fabulous speed."

"Perhaps!" Dr. Mundson worked with the controls. "Here, I've cut her down to the average speed of the ordinary airplane. Now you can see a bit of the night scenery."

Northwood peeped out the thick glass porthole. Far below, he saw two tiny streaks of light, one smooth and stationery, the other wavering as though it were a reflection in water.

"That can't be a lighthouse!" he cried.

The scientist glanced out. "It is. We're approaching the Florida Keys."

"Impossible! We've been traveling less than an hour."

"But, my young friend, do you realize that my sun-ship has a speed of over one thousand miles an hour, how much over I dare not tell you?"

Throughout the night, Northwood sat beside Dr. Mundson, watching his deft fingers control the simple-looking buttons and levers. So fast was their flight now that, through the portholes, sky and earth looked the same: dark gray films of emptiness. The continuous weird whistle from the hidden mechanism of the sun-ship was like the drone of a monster insect, monotonous and soporific during the long intervals when the scientist was too busy with his controls to engage in conversation.

For some reason that he could not explain, Northwood had an aversion to going into the sleeping apartment behind the control room. Then, towards morning, when the suddenly falling temperature struck a biting chill throughout the sun-ship, Northwood, going into the cabin for fur coats, discovered why his mind and body shrank in horror from the cabin.

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After he had procured the fur coats from a closet, he paused a moment, in the privacy of the cabin, to look at Athalia's picture. Every nerve in his body leaped to meet the magnetism of her beautiful eyes. Never had Mary Burns stirred emotion like this in him. He hung over Mary's picture, wistfully, hoping almost prayerfully that he could react to her as he did to Athalia; but her pale, over-intellectual face left him

cold.

"Cad!" he ground out between his teeth. "Forgetting her so soon!"

The two pictures were lying side by side on a little table. Suddenly an obscure noise in the room caught his attention. It was more vibration than noise, for small sounds could scarcely be heard above the whistle of the sun-ship. A slight compression of the air against his neck gave him the eery feeling that someone was standing close behind him. He wheeled and looked over his shoulder. Half ashamed of his startled gesture, he again turned to his pictures. Then a sharp cry broke from him.

Athalia's picture was gone.

He searched for it everywhere in the room, in his own pockets, under the furniture. It was nowhere to be found.

In sudden, overpowering horror, he seized the fur coats and returned to the control room.

* * * * *

Dr. Mundson was changing the speed.

"Look out the window!" he called to Northwood.

The young man looked and started violently. Day had come, and now that the sun-ship was flying at a moderate speed, the ocean beneath was plainly visible; and its entire surface was covered with broken floes of ice and small, ragged icebergs. He seized a telescope and focused it below. A typical polar scene met his eyes: penguins strutted about on cakes of ice, a whale blowing in the icy water.

"A part of the Antarctic that has never been explored," said Dr. Mundson; "and there, just showing on the horizon, is the Great Ice Barrier." His characteristic smile lighted the morose black eyes. "I am enough of the dramatist to wish you to be impressed with what I shall show you within less than an hour. Accordingly, I shall make a landing and let you feel polar ice under your feet."

After less than a minute's search, Dr. Mundson found a suitable place on the ice for a landing, and, with a few deft manipulations of the controls, brought the sun-ship swooping down like an eagle on its prey.

For a long moment after the scientist had stepped out on the ice, Northwood paused at the door. His feet were chained by a strange reluctance to enter this white, dead wilderness of ice. But Dr. Mundson's impatient, "Ready?" drew from him one last glance at the cozy interior of the sun-ship before he, too, went out into the frozen stillness.

They left the sun-ship resting on the ice like a fallen silver moon, while they wandered to the edge of the Barrier and looked at the gray, narrow stretch of sea between the ice pack and the high cliffs of the Barrier. The sun of the commencing six-months' Antarctic day was a low, cold ball whose slanted rays struck the ice with blinding whiteness. There were constant falls of ice from the Barrier, which thundered into the ocean amid great clouds of ice smoke that lingered like wraiths around the edge. It was a scene of loneliness and waiting death.

"What's that?" exclaimed the scientist suddenly.

Out of the white silence shrilled a low whistle, a familiar whistle. Both men wheeled toward the sun-ship.

Before their horrified eyes, the great sphere jerked and glided up, and swerved into the heavens.

* * * * *

Up it soared; then, gaining speed, it swung into the blue distance until, in a moment, it was a tiny star that flickered out even as they watched.

Both men screamed and cursed and flung up their arms despairingly. A penguin, attracted by their cries, waddled solemnly over to them and regarded them with manlike curiosity.

"Stranded in the coldest spot on earth!" groaned the scientist.

"Why did it start itself, Dr. Mundson!" Northwood narrowed his eyes as he spoke.

"It didn't!" The scientist's huge face, red from cold, quivered with helpless rage. "Human hands started it."

"What! Whose hands?"

"_Ach!_ Do I know?" His Teutonic accent grew more pronounced, as it always did when he was under emotional stress. "Somebody whose brain is better than mine. Somebody who found a way to hide away from our eyes. _Ach, Gott!_ Don't let me think!"

His great head sank between his shoulders, giving him, in his fur suit, the grotesque appearance of a friendly brown bear.

"Doctor Mundson," said Northwood suddenly, "did you have an enemy, a man with the face and body of a pagan god--a great, blond creature with eyes as cold and cruel as the ice under our feet?"

"Wait!" The huge round head jerked up. "How do you know about Adam? You have not seen him, won't see him until we arrive at our destination."

"But I have seen him. He was sitting not thirty feet from you in the Mad Hatter's Club last night. Didn't you know? He followed me to the street, spoke to me, and then--" Northwood stopped. How could he let the insane words pass his lips?

"Then, what? Speak up!"

* * * * *

Northwood laughed nervously. "It sounds foolish, but I saw him vanish like that." He snapped his fingers.

"_Ach, Gott!_" All the ruddy color drained from the scientist's face. As though talking to himself, he continued:

"Then it is true, as he said. He has crossed the bridge. He has reached the Light. And now he comes to see the world he will conquer--came unseen when I refused my permission."

He was silent for a long time, pondering. Then he turned passionately to Northwood.

"John Northwood, kill me! I have brought a new horror into the world. From the unborn future, I have snatched a creature who has reached the Light too soon. Kill me!" He bowed his great, shaggy head.

"What do you mean, Dr. Mundson: that this Adam has arrived at a point in evolution beyond this age?"

"Yes. Think of it! I visioned godlike creatures with the souls of gods. But, Heaven help us, man always will be man: always will lust for conquest. You and I, Northwood, and all others are barbarians to Adam. He and his kind will do what men always do to barbarians--conquer and kill."

"Are there more like him?" Northwood struggled with a smile of unbelief.

"I don't know. I did not know that Adam had reached a point so near the ultimate. But you have seen. Already he is able to set aside what we call natural laws."

Northwood looked at the scientist closely. The man was surely mad--mad in this desert of white death.

"Come!" he said cheerfully. "Let's build an Eskimo snow house. We can live on penguins for days. And who knows what may rescue us?"

For three hours the two worked at cutting ice blocks. With snow for mortar, they built a crude shelter which enabled them to rest out of the cold breath of the spiral polar winds that blew from the south.

* * * * *

Dr. Mundson was sitting at the door of their hut, moodily pulling at his strong, black pipe. As though a fit had seized him, he leaped up and let his pipe fall to the ice.

"Look!" he shouted. "The sun-ship!"

It seemed but a moment before the tiny speck on the horizon had swept overhead, a silver comet on the grayish-blue polar sky. In another moment it had swooped down, eaglewise, scarcely fifty feet from the ice hut.

Dr. Mundson and Northwood ran forward. From the metal sphere stepped the stranger of the Mad Hatter Club. His tall, straight form, erect and slim, swung toward them over the ice.

"Adam!" shouted Dr. Mundson. "What does this mean? How dare you!"

Adam's laugh was like the happy demonstration of a boy. "So? You think you still are master? You think I returned because I revered you

yet?" Hate shot viciously through the freezing blue eyes. "You worm of the Black Age!"

Northwood shuddered. He had heard those strange words addressed to himself scarcely more than twelve hours ago.

Adam was still speaking: "With a thought I could annihilate you where you are standing. But I have use for you. Get in." He swept his hand to the sun-ship.

Both men hesitated. Then Northwood strode forward until he was within three feet of Adam. They stood thus, eyeing each other, two splendid beings, one blond as a Viking, the other dark and vital.

"Just what is your game?" demanded Northwood.

The icy eyes shot forth a gleam like lightning. "I needn't tell you, of course, but I may as well let you suffer over the knowledge." He curled his lips with superb scorn. "I have one human weakness. I want Athalia." The icy eyes warmed for a fleeting second. "She is anticipating her meeting with you--bah! The taste of these women of the Black Age! I could kill you, of course; but that would only inflame her. And so I take you to her, thrust you down her throat. When she sees you, she will fly to me." He spread his magnificent chest.

"Adam!" Dr. Mundson's face was dark with anger. "What of Eve?"

"Who are you to question my actions? What a fool you were to let me, whom you forced into life thousands of years too soon, grow more powerful than you! Before I am through with all of you petty creatures of the Black Age, you will call me more terrible than your Jehovah! For see what you have called forth from unborn time."

He vanished.

* * * * *

Before the startled men could recover from the shock of it, the vibrant, too-new voice went on:

"I am sorry for you, Mundson, because, like you, I need specimens for my experiments. What a splendid specimen you will be!" His laugh was ugly with significance. "Get in, worms!"

Unseen hands cuffed and pushed them into the sun-ship.

Inside, Dr. Mundson stumbled to the control room, white and drawn of face, his great brain seemingly paralyzed by the catastrophe.

"You needn't attempt tricks," went on the voice. "I am watching you both. You cannot even hide your thoughts from me."

And thus began the strange continuation of the journey. Not once, in that wild half-hour's rush over the polar ice clouds, did they see Adam. They saw and heard only the weird signs of his presence: a puffing cigar hanging in midair, a glass of water swinging to unseen lips, a ghostly voice hurling threats and insults at them.

Once the scientist whispered: "Don't cross him; it is useless. John Northwood, you'll have to fight a demigod for your woman!"

Because of the terrific speed of the sun-ship, Northwood could distinguish nothing of the topographical details below. At the end of half-an-hour, the scientist slowed enough to point out a tall range of snow-covered mountains, over which hovered a play of colored lights like the _aurora australis_.

"Behind those mountains," he said, "is our destination."

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Almost in a moment, the sun-ship had soared over the peaks. Dr. Mundson kept the speed low enough for Northwood to see the splendid view below.

In the giant cup formed by the encircling mountain range was a green valley of tropical luxuriance. Stretches of dense forest swept half up the mountains and filled the valley cup with tangled verdure. In the center, surrounded by a broad field and a narrow ring of woods, towered a group of buildings. From the largest, which was circular, came the auroralike radiance that formed an umbrella of light over the entire valley.

"Do I guess right," said Northwood, "that the light is responsible for this oasis in the ice?"

"Yes," said Dr. Mundson. "In your American slang, it is canned sunshine containing an overabundance of certain rays, especially the Life Ray, which I have isolated." He smiled proudly. "You needn't look startled,

my friend. Some of the most common things store sunlight. On very dark nights, if you have sharp eyes, you can see the radiance given off by certain flowers, which many naturalists say is trapped sunshine. The familiar nasturtium and the marigold opened for me the way to hold sunshine against the long polar night, for they taught me how to apply the Einstein theory of bent light. Stated simply, during the polar night, when the sun is hidden over the rim of the world, we steal some of his rays; during the polar day we concentrate the light."

"But could stored sunshine alone give enough warmth for the luxuriant growth of those jungles?"

"An overabundance of the Life Ray is responsible for the miraculous growth of all life in New Eden. The Life Ray is Nature's most powerful force. Yet Nature is often niggardly and paradoxical in her use of her powers. In New Eden, we have forced the powers of creation to take ascendancy over the powers of destruction."

At Northwood's sudden start, the scientist laughed and continued: "Is it not a pity that Nature, left alone, requires twenty years to make a man who begins to die in another ten years? Such waste is not tolerated in New Eden, where supermen are younger than babes and--"

"Come, worms; let's land."

It was Adam's voice. Suddenly he materialized, a blond god, whose eyes and flesh were too new.

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They were in a world of golden skylight, warmth and tropical vegetation. The field on which they had landed was covered with a velvety green growth of very soft, fine-bladed grass, sprinkled with tiny, star-shaped blue flowers. A balmy, sweet-scented wind, downy as the breeze of a dream, blew gently along the grass and tingled against Northwood's skin refreshingly. Almost instantly he had the sensation of perfect well being, and this feeling of physical perfection was part of the ecstasy that seemed to pervade the entire valley. Grass and breeze and golden skylight were saturated with a strange ether of joyousness.

At one end of the field was a dense jungle, cut through by a road that led to the towering building from which, while above in the sun-ship, they had seen the golden light issue.

From the jungle road came a man and a woman, large, handsome people, whose flesh and eyes had the sinister newness of Adam's. Even before they came close enough to speak, Northwood was aware that while they seemed of Adam's breed, they were yet unlike him. The difference was psychical rather than physical; they lacked the aura of hate and horror that surrounded Adam. The woman drew Adam's head down and kissed him affectionately on both cheeks.

Adam, from his towering height, patted her shoulder impatiently and said: "Run on back to the laboratory, grandmother. We're following soon. You have some new human embryos, I believe you told me this morning."

"Four fine specimens, two of them being your sister's twins."

"Splendid! I was sure that creation had stopped with my generation. I must see them." He turned to the scientist and Northwood. "You needn't try to leave this spot. Of course I shall know instantly and deal with you in my own way. Wait here."

He strode over the emerald grass on the heels of the woman.

Northwood asked: "Why does he call that girl grandmother?"

"Because she is his ancestress." He stirred uneasily. "She is of the first generation brought forth in the laboratory, and is no different from you or I, except that, at the age of five years, she is the ancestress of twenty generations."

"My God!" muttered Northwood.

"Don't start being horrified, my friend. Forget about so-called natural laws while you are in New Eden. Remember, here we have isolated the Life Ray. But look! Here comes your Athalia!"

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Northwood gazed covertly at the beautiful girl approaching them with a rarely graceful walk. She was tall, slender, round-bosomed, narrow-hipped, and she held her lovely body in the erect poise of splendid health. Northwood had a confused realization of uncovered bronzy hair, drawn to the back of a white neck in a bunch of short curls; of immense soft black eyes; lips the color of blood, and delicate, plump flesh on which the golden skylight lingered graciously.

He was instantly glad to see that while she possessed the freshness of young girlhood, her skin and eyes did not have the horrible newness of Adam's.

When she was still twenty feet distant, Northwood met her eyes and she smiled shyly. The rich, red blood ran through her face; and he, too, flushed.

She went to Dr. Mundson and, placing her hands on his thick shoulders, kissed him affectionately.

"I've been worried about you, Daddy Mundson." Her rich contralto voice matched her exotic beauty. "Since you and Adam had that quarrel the day you left, I did not see him until this morning, when he landed the sun-ship alone."

"And you pleaded with him to return for us?"

"Yes." Her eyes drooped and a hot flush swept over her face.

Dr. Mundson smiled. "But I'm back now, Athalia, and I've brought some one whom I hope you will be glad to know."

Reaching for her hand, he placed it simply in Northwood's.

"This is John, Athalia. Isn't he handsomer than the pictures of him which I telegraphed to you? God bless both of you."

He walked ahead and turned his back.

* * * * *

A magical half hour followed for Northwood and Athalia. The girl told him of her past life, how Dr. Mundson had discovered her one year ago working in a New York sweat shop, half dead from consumption. Without friends, she was eager to follow the scientist to New Eden, where he promised she would recover her health immediately.

"And he was right, John," she said shyly. "The Life Ray, that marvelous energy ray which penetrates to the utmost depths of earth and ocean, giving to the cells of all living bodies the power to grow and remain animate, has been concentrated by Dr. Mundson in his stored sunshine. The Life Ray healed me almost immediately."

Northwood looked down at the glorious girl beside him, whose eyes already fluttered away from his like shy black butterflies. Suddenly he squeezed the soft hand in his and said passionately:

"Athalia! Because Adam wants you and will get you if he can, let us set aside all the artificialities of civilization. I have loved you madly ever since I saw your picture. If you can say the same to me, it will give me courage to face what I know lies before me."

Athalia, her face suddenly tender, came closer to him.

"John Northwood, I love you."

Her red lips came temptingly close; but before he could touch them, Adam suddenly pushed his body between him and Athalia. Adam was pale, and all the iciness was gone from his blue eyes, which were deep and dark and very human. He looked down at Athalia, and she looked up at him, two handsome specimens of perfect manhood and womanhood.

"Fast work, Athalia!" The new vibrant voice was strained. "I was hoping you would be disappointed in him, especially after having been wooed by me this morning. I could take you if I wished, of course; but I prefer to win you in the ancient manner. Dismiss him!" He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in Northwood's direction.

Athalia flushed vividly and looked at him almost compassionately. "I am not great enough for you, Adam. I dare not love you."

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Adam laughed, and still oblivious of Northwood and Dr. Mundson, folded his arms over his breast. With the golden skylight on his burnished hair, he was a valiant, magnificent spectacle.

"Since the beginning of time, gods and archangels have looked upon the daughters of men and found them fair. Mate with me, Athalia, and I, fifty thousand years beyond the creature Mundson has selected for you, will make you as I am, the deathless overlord of life and all nature."

He drew her hand to his bosom.

For one dark moment, Northwood felt himself seared by jealousy, for, through the plump, sweet flesh of Athalia's face, he saw the red blood leap again. How could she withhold herself from this splendid superman?

But her answer, given with faltering voice, was the old, simple one: "I have promised him, Adam. I love him." Tears trembled on her thick lashes.

"So! I cannot get you in the ancient manner. Now I'll use my own."

He seized her in his arms crushed her against him, and, laughing over her head at Northwood, bent his glistening head and kissed her on the mouth.

There was a blinding flash of blue electric sparks--and nothing else. Both Adam and Athalia had vanished.

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Adam's voice came in a last mocking challenge: "I shall be what no other gods before me have been--a good sport. I'll leave you both to your own devices, until I want you again."

White-lipped and trembling, Northwood groaned: "What has he done now?"

Dr. Mundson's great head drooped. "I don't know. Our bodies are electric and chemical machines; and a super intelligence has discovered new laws of which you and I are ignorant."

"But Athalia...."

"She is safe; he loves her."

"Loves her!" Northwood shivered. "I cannot believe that those freezing eyes could ever look with love on a woman."

"Adam is a man. At heart he is as human as the first man-creature that wallowed in the new earth's slime." His voice dropped as though he were musing aloud. "It might be well to let him have Athalia. She will help to keep vigor in the new race, which would stop reproducing in another few generations without the injection of Black Age blood."

"Do you want to bring more creatures like Adam into the world?" Northwood flung at him. "You have tampered with life enough, Dr. Mundson. But, although Adam has my sympathy, I'm not willing to turn Athalia over to him."

"Well said! Now come to the laboratory for chemical nourishment and rest under the Life Ray."

They went to the great circular building from whose highest tower issued the golden radiance that shamed the light of the sun, hanging low in the northeast.

"John Northwood," said Dr. Mundson, "with that laboratory, which is the center of all life in New Eden, we'll have to whip Adam. He gave us what he called a 'sporting chance' because he knew that he is able to send us and all mankind to a doom more terrible than hell. Even now we might be entering some hideous trap that he has set for us."

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They entered by a side entrance and went immediately to what Dr. Mundson called the Rest Ward. Here, in a large room, were ranged rows of cots, on many of which lay men basking in the deep orange flood of light which poured from individual lamps set above each cot.

"It is the Life Ray!" said Dr. Mundson reverently. "The source of all growth and restoration in Nature. It is the power that bursts open the seed and brings forth the shoot, that increases the shoot into a giant tree. It is the same power that enables the fertilized ovum to develop into an animal. It creates and recreates cells almost instantly; accordingly, it is the perfect substitute for sleep. Stretch out, enjoy its power; and while you rest, eat these nourishing tablets."

Northwood lay on a cot, and Dr. Mundson turned the Life Ray on him. For a few minutes a delicious drowsiness fell upon him, producing a spell of perfect peace which the cells of his being seemed to drink in. For another delirious, fleeting space, every inch of him vibrated with a thrilling sensation of freshness. He took a deep, ecstatic breath and opened his eyes.

"Enough," said Dr. Mundson, switching off the Ray. "After three minutes of rejuvenation, you are commencing again with perfect cells. All ravages from disease and wear have been corrected."

Northwood leaped up joyously. His handsome eyes sparkled, his skin glowed. "I feel great! Never felt so good since I was a kid."

A pleased grin spread over the scientist's homely face. "See what my discovery will mean to the world! In the future we shall all go to the

laboratory for recuperation and nourishment. We'll have almost twenty-four hours a day for work and play."

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He stretched out on the bed contentedly. "Some day, when my work is nearly done, I shall permit the Life Ray to cure my hump."

"Why not now?"

Dr. Mundson sighed. "If I were perfect, I should cease to be so overwhelmingly conscious of the importance of perfection." He settled back to enjoyment of the Life Ray.

A few minutes later, he jumped up, alert as a boy. "_Ach!_ That's fine. Now I'll show you how the Life Ray speeds up development and produces four generations of humans a year."

With restored energy, Northwood began thinking of Athalia. As he followed Dr. Mundson down a long corridor, he yearned to see her again, to be certain that she was safe. Once he imagined he felt a gentle, soft-fleshed touch against his hand, and was disappointed not to see her walking by his side. Was she with him, unseen? The thought was sweet.

Before Dr. Mundson opened the massive bronze door at the end of the corridor, he said:

"Don't be surprised or shocked over anything you see here, John Northwood. This is the Baby Laboratory."

They entered a room which seemed no different from a hospital ward. On little white beds lay naked children of various sizes, perfect, solemn-eyed youngsters and older children as beautiful as animated statues. Above each bed was a small Life Ray projector. A white-capped nurse went from bed to bed.

"They are recuperating from the daily educational period," said the scientist. "After a few minutes of this they will go into the growing room, which I shall have to show you through a window. Should you and I enter, we might be changed in a most extraordinary manner." He laughed mischievously. "But, look, Northwood!"

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He slid back a panel in the wall, and Northwood peered in through a thick pane of clear glass. The room was really an immense outdoor arena, its only carpet the fine-bladed grass, its roof the blue sky cut in the middle by an enormous disc from which shot the aurora of trapped sunshine which made a golden umbrella over the valley. Through openings in the bottom of the disc poured a fine rain of rays which fell constantly upon groups of children, youths and young girls, all clad in the merest scraps of clothing. Some were dancing, others were playing games, but all seemed as supremely happy as the birds and butterflies which fluttered about the shrubs and flowers edging the arena.

"I don't expect you to believe," said Dr. Mundson, "that the oldest young man in there is three months old. You cannot see visible changes in a body which grows as slowly as the human being, whose normal period of development is twenty years or more. But I can give you visible proof of how fast growth takes place under the full power of the Life Ray. Plant life, which, even when left to nature, often develops from seed to flower within a few weeks or months, can be seen making its miraculous changes under the Life Ray. Watch those gorgeous purple flowers over which the butterflies are hovering."

Northwood followed his pointing finger. Near the glass window through which they looked grew an enormous bank of resplendent violet colored flowers, which literally enshrouded the entire bush with their royal glory. At first glance it seemed as though a violent wind were snatching at flower and bush, but closer inspection proved that the agitation was part of the plant itself. And then he saw that the movements were the result of perpetual composition and growth.

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He fastened his eyes on one huge bud. He saw it swell, burst, spread out its passionate purple velvet, lift the broad flower face to the light for a joyous minute. A few seconds later a butterfly lighted airily to sample its nectar and to brush the pollen from its yellow dusted wings. Scarcely had the winged visitor flown away than the purple petals began to wither and fall away, leaving the seed pod on the stem. The visible change went on in this seed pod. It turned rapidly brown, dried out, and then sent the released seeds in a shower to the rich black earth below. Scarcely had the seeds touched the ground than they sent up tiny green shoots that grew larger each moment. Within ten minutes there was a new plant a foot high. Within half an hour, the plant budded, blossomed, and cast forth its own seed.

"You understand?" asked the scientist. "Development is going on as rapidly among the children. Before the first year has passed, the youngest baby will have grandchildren; that is, if the baby tests out fit to pass its seed down to the new generation. I know it sounds absurd. Yet you saw the plant."

"But Doctor," Northwood rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, "Nature's forces of destruction, of tearing down, are as powerful as her creative powers. You have discovered the ultimate in creation and upbuilding. But perhaps--oh, Lord, it is too awful to think!"

"Speak, Northwood!" The scientist's voice was impatient.

"It is nothing!" The pale young man attempted a smile. "I was only imagining some of the horror that could be thrust on the world if a supermind like Adam's should discover Nature's secret of death and destruction and speed it up as you have sped the life force."

"_Ach Gott!_" Dr. Mundson's face was white. "He has his own laboratory, where he works every day. Don't talk so loud. He might be listening. And I believe he can do anything he sets out to accomplish."

Close to Northwood's ear fell a faint, triumphant whisper: "Yes, he can do anything. How did you guess, worm?"

It was Adam's voice.

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"Now come and see the Leyden jar mothers," said Dr. Mundson. "We do not wait for the child to be born to start our work."

He took Northwood to a laboratory crowded with strange apparatus, where young men and women worked. Northwood knew instantly that these people, although unusually handsome and strong, were not of Adam's generation. None of them had the look of newness which marked those who had grown up under the Life Ray.

"They are the perfect couples whom I combed the world to find," said the scientist. "From their eugenic marriages sprang the first children that passed through the laboratory. I had hoped," he hesitated and looked sideways at Northwood, "I had dreamed of having the children of you and Athalia to help strengthen the New Race."

A wave of sudden disgust passed over Northwood.

"Thanks," he said tartly. "When I marry Athalia, I intend to have an old-fashioned home and a Black Age family. I don't relish having my children turned into--experiments."

"But wait until you see all the wonders of the laboratory! That is why I am showing you all this."

Northwood drew his handkerchief and mopped his brow. "It sickens me, Doctor! The more I see, the more pity I have for Adam--and the less I blame him for his rebellion and his desire to kill and to rule. Heavens! What a terrible thing you have done, experimenting with human life."

"Nonsense! Can you say that all life--all matter--is not the result of scientific experiment? Can you?" His black gaze made Northwood uncomfortable. "Buck up, young friend, for now I am going to show you a marvelous improvement on Nature's bungling ways--the Leyden jar mother." He raised his voice and called, "Lilith!"

The woman whom they had met on the field came forward.

"May we take a peep at Lona's twins?" asked the scientist. "They are about ready to go to the growing dome, are they not?"

"In five more minutes," said the woman. "Come see."

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She lifted one of the black velvet curtains that lined an entire side of the laboratory and thereby disclosed a globular jar of glass and metal, connected by wires to a dynamo. Above the jar was a Life Ray projector. Lilith slid aside a metal portion of the jar, disclosing through the glass underneath the squirming, kicking body of a baby, resting on a bed of soft, spongy substance, to which it was connected by the navel cord.

"The Leyden jar mother," said Dr. Mundson. "It is the dream of us scientists realized. The human mother's body does nothing but nourish and protect her unborn child, a job which science can do better. And so, in New Eden, we take the young embryo and place it in the Leyden jar mother, where the Life Ray, electricity, and chemical food shortens the period of gestation to a few days."

At that moment a bell under the Leyden jar began to ring. Dr. Mundson

uncovered the jar and lifted out the child, a beautiful, perfectly formed boy, who began to cry lustily.

"Here is one baby who'll never be kissed," he said. "He'll be nourished chemically, and, at the end of the week, will no longer be a baby. If you are patient, you can actually see the processes of development taking place under the Life Ray, for babies develop very fast."

Northwood buried his face in his hands. "Lord! This is awful. No childhood; no mother to mould his mind! No parents to watch over him, to give him their tender care!"

"Awful, fiddlesticks! Come see how children get their education, how they learn to use their hands and feet so they need not pass through the awkwardness of childhood."

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He led Northwood to a magnificent building whose façade of white marble was as simply beautiful as a Greek temple. The side walls, built almost entirely of glass, permitted the synthetic sunshine to sweep from end to end. They first entered a library, where youths and young girls poured over books of all kinds. Their manner of reading mystified Northwood. With a single sweep of the eye, they seemed to devour a page, and then turned to the next. He stepped closer to peer over the shoulder of a beautiful girl. She was reading "Euclid's Elements of Geometry," in Latin, and she turned the pages as swiftly as the other girl occupying her table, who was devouring "Paradise Lost."

Dr. Mundson whispered to him: "If you do not believe that Ruth here is getting her Euclid, which she probably never saw before to-day, examine her from the book; that is, if you are a good enough Latin scholar."

Ruth stopped her reading to talk to him, and, in a few minutes, had completely dumbfounded him with her pedantic replies, which fell from lips as luscious and unformed as an infant's.

"Now," said Dr. Mundson, "test Rachael on her Milton. As far as she has read, she should not misquote a line, and her comments will probably prove her scholarly appreciation of Milton."

Word for word, Rachael was able to give him "Paradise Lost" from memory, except the last four pages, which she had not read. Then, taking the book from him, she swept her eyes over these pages, returned the book to

him, and quoted copiously and correctly.

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Dr. Mundson gloated triumphantly over his astonishment. "There, my friend. Could you now be satisfied with old-fashioned children who spend long, expensive years in getting an education? Of course, your children will not have the perfect brains of these, yet, developed under the Life Ray, they should have splendid mentality.

"These children, through selective breeding, have brains that make everlasting records instantly. A page in a book, once seen, is indelibly retained by them, and understood. The same is true of a lecture, of an explanation given by a teacher, of even idle conversation. Any man or woman in this room should be able to repeat the most trivial conversation days old."

"But what of the arts, Dr. Mundson? Surely even your supermen and women cannot instantly learn to paint a masterpiece or to guide their fingers and their brains through the intricacies of a difficult musical composition."

"No?" His dark eyes glowed. "Come see!"

Before they entered another wing of the building, they heard a violin being played masterfully.

Dr. Mundson paused at the door.

"So that you may understand what you shall see, let me remind you that the nerve impulses and the coordinating means in the human body are purely electrical. The world has not yet accepted my theory, but it will. Under superman's system of education, the instantaneous records made on the brain give immediate skill to the acting parts of the body. Accordingly, musicians are made over night."

He threw open the door. Under a Life Ray projector, a beautiful, Juno-esque woman was playing a violin. Facing her, and with eyes fastened to hers, stood a young man, whose arms and slender fingers mimicked every motion she made. Presently she stopped playing and handed the violin to him. In her own masterly manner, he repeated the score she had played.

"That is Eve," whispered Dr. Mundson. "I had selected her as Adam's

wife. But he does not want her, the most brilliant woman of the New Race."

Northwood gave the woman an appraising look. "Who wants a perfect woman? I don't blame Adam for preferring Athalia. But how is she teaching her pupil?"

"Through thought vibration, which these perfect people have developed until they can record permanently the radioactive waves of the brains of others."

Eve turned, caught Northwood's eyes in her magnetic blue gaze, and smiled as only a goddess can smile upon a mortal she has marked as her own. She came toward him with outflung hands.

"So you have come!" Her vibrant contralto voice, like Adam's, held the birdlike, broken tremulo of a young child's. "I have been waiting for you, John Northwood."

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Her eyes, as blue and icy as Adam's, lingered long on him, until he flinched from their steely magnetism. She slipped her arm through his and drew him gently but firmly from the room, while Dr. Mundson stood gaping after them.

They were on a flagged terrace arched with roses of gigantic size, which sent forth billows of sensuous fragrance. Eve led him to a white marble seat piled with silk cushions, on which she reclined her superb body, while she regarded him from narrowed lids.

"I saw your picture that he televisioned to Athalia," she said. "What a botch Dr. Mundson has made of his mating." Her laugh rippled like falling water. "I want you, John Northwood!"

Northwood started and blushed furiously. Smile dimples broke around her red, humid lips.

"Ah, you're old-fashioned!"

Her large, beautiful hand, fleshed more tenderly than any woman's hand he had ever seen, went out to him appealingly. "I can bring you amorous delight that your Athalia never could offer in her few years of youth. And I'll never grow old, John Northwood."

She came closer until he could feel the fragrant warmth of her tawny, ribbon bound hair pulse against his face. In sudden panic he drew back.

"But I am pledged to Athalia!" tumbled from him. "It is all a dreadful mistake, Eve. You and Adam were created for each other."

"Hush!" The lightning that flashed from her blue eyes changed her from seductress to angry goddess. "Created for each other! Who wants a made-to-measure lover?"

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The luscious lips trembled slightly, and into the vivid eyes crept a suspicion of moisture. Eternal Eve's weapons! Northwood's handsome face relaxed with pity.

"I want you, John Northwood," she continued shamelessly. "Our love will be sublime." She leaned heavily against him, and her lips were like a blood red flower pressed against white satin. "Come, beloved, kiss me!"

Northwood gasped and turned his head. "Don't, Eve!"

"But a kiss from me will set you apart from all your generation, John Northwood, and you shall understand what no man of the Black Age could possibly fathom."

Her hair had partly fallen from its ribbon bandage and poured its fragrant gold against his shoulder.

"For God's sake, don't tempt me!" he groaned. "What do you mean?"

"That mental and physical and spiritual contact with me will temporarily give you, a three-dimension creature, the power of the new sense, which your race will not have for fifty thousand years."

White-lipped and trembling, he demanded: "Explain!"

Eve smiled. "Have you not guessed that Adam has developed an additional sense? You've seen him vanish. He and I have the sixth sense of Time Perception--the new sense which enables us to penetrate what you of the Black Age call the Fourth Dimension. Even you whose mentalities are framed by three dimensions have this sixth sense instinct. Your very religion is based on it, for you believe that in another life you shall

step into Time, or, as you call it, eternity." She leaned closer so that her hair brushed his cheek. "What is eternity, John Northwood? Is it not keeping forever ahead of the Destroyer? The future is eternal, for it is never reached. Adam and I, through our new sense which comprehends Time and Space, can vanish by stepping a few seconds into the future, the Fourth Dimension of Space. Death can never reach us, not even accidental death, unless that which causes death could also slip into the future, which is not yet possible."

"But if the Fourth Dimension is future Time, why can one in the third dimension feel the touch of an unseen presence in the Fourth Dimension--hear his voice, even?"

"Thought vibration. The touch is not really felt nor the voice heard: they are only imagined. The radioactive waves of the brain of even you Black Age people are swift enough to bridge Space and Time. And it is the mind that carries us beyond the third dimension."

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Her red mouth reached closer to him, her blue eyes touched hidden forces that slept in remote cells of his being. "You are going into Eternal Time, John Northwood, Eternity without beginning or end. You understand? You feel it? Comprehend it? Now for the contact--kiss me!"

Northwood had seen Athalia vanish under Adam's kiss. Suddenly, in one mad burst of understanding, he leaned over to his magnificent temptress.

For a split second he felt the sweet pressure of baby-soft lips, and then the atoms of his body seemed to fly asunder. Black chaos held him for a frightful moment before he felt sanity return.

He was back on the terrace again, with Eve by his side. They were standing now. The world about him looked the same, yet there was a subtle change in everything.

Eve laughed softly. "It is puzzling, isn't it? You're seeing everything as in a mirror. What was left before is now right. Only you and I are real. All else is but a vision, a dream. For now you and I are existing one minute in future time, or, more simply, we are in the Fourth Dimension. To everything in the third dimension, we are invisible. Let me show you that Dr. Mundson cannot see you."

They went back to the room beyond the terrace. Dr. Mundson was not

present.

"There he goes down the jungle path," said Eve, looking out a window. She laughed. "Poor old fellow. The children of his genius are worrying him."

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They were standing in the recess formed by a bay window. Eve picked up his hand and laid it against her face, giving him the full, blasting glory of her smiling blue eyes.

Northwood, looking away miserably, uttered a low cry. Coming over the field beyond were Adam and Athalia. By the trimming on the blue dress she wore, he could see that she was still in the Fourth Dimension, for he did not see her as a mirror image.

A look of fear leaped to Eve's face. She clutched Northwood's arm, trembling.

"I don't want Adam to see that I have passed you beyond," she gasped. "We are existing but one minute in the future. Always Adam and I have feared to pass too far beyond the sweetness of reality. But now, so that Adam may not see us, we shall step five minutes into what-is-yet-to-be. And even he, with all his power, cannot see into a future that is more distant than that in which he exists."

She raised her humid lips to his. "Come, beloved."

Northwood kissed her. Again came the moment of confusion, of the awful vacancy that was like death, and then he found himself and Eve in the laboratory, following Adam and Athalia down a long corridor. Athalia was crying and pleading frantically with Adam. Once she stopped and threw herself at his feet in a gesture of dramatic supplication, arms outflung, streaming eyes wide open with fear.

Adam stooped and lifted her gently and continued on his way, supporting her against his side.

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Eve dug her fingers into Northwood's arm. Horror contorted her face, horror mixed with rage.

"My mind hears what he is saying, understands the vile plan he has made, John Northwood. He is on his way to his laboratory to destroy not only you and most of these in New Eden, but me as well. He wants only Athalia."

Striding forward like an avenging goddess, she pulled Northwood after her.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "Remember, you and I are five minutes in the future, and Adam is only one. We are witnessing what will occur four minutes from now. We yet have time to reach the laboratory before him and be ready for him when he enters. And because he will have to go back to Present Time to do his work of destruction, I will be able to destroy him. Ah!"

Fierce joy burned in her flashing blue eyes, and her slender nostrils quivered delicately. Northwood, peeping at her in horror, knew that no mercy could be expected of her. And when she stopped at a certain door and inserted a key, he remembered Athalia. What if she should enter with Adam in Present Time?

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They were inside Adam's laboratory, a huge apartment filled with queer apparatus and cages of live animals. The room was a strange paradox. Part of the equipment, the walls, and the floor was glistening with newness, and part was moulding with extreme age. The powers of disintegration that haunt a tropical forest seemed to be devouring certain spots of the room. Here, in the midst of bright marble, was a section of wall that seemed as old as the pyramids. The surface of the stone had an appalling mouldiness, as though it had been lifted from an ancient graveyard where it had lain in the festering ground for unwholesome centuries.

Between cracks in this stained and decayed section of stone grew fetid moss that quivered with the microscopic organisms that infest age-rotten places. Sections of the flooring and woodwork also reeked with mustiness. In one dark, webby corner of the room lay a pile of bleached bones, still tinted with the ghastly grays and pinks of putrefaction. Northwood, overwhelmingly nauseated, withdrew his eyes from the bones, only to see, in another corner, a pile of worm-eaten clothing that lay on the floor in the outline of a man.

Faint with the reek of ancient mustiness, Northwood retreated to the

door, dizzy and staggering.

"It sickens you," said Eve, "and it sickens me also, for death and decay are not pleasant. Yet Nature, left to herself, reduces all to this. Every grave that has yawned to receive its prey hides corruption no less shocking. Nature's forces of creation and destruction forever work in partnership. Never satisfied with her composition, she destroys and starts again, building, building towards the ultimate of perfection. Thus, it is natural that if Dr. Mundson isolated the Life Ray, Nature's supreme force of compensation, isolation of the Death Ray should closely follow. Adam, thirsting for power, has succeeded. A few sweeps of his unholy ray of decomposition will undo all Dr. Mundson's work in this valley and reduce it to a stinking holocaust of destruction. And the time for his striking has come!"

She seized his face and drew it toward her. "Quick!" she said. "We'll have to go back to the third dimension. I could leave you safe in the fourth, but if anything should happen to me, you would be stranded forever in future time."

She kissed his lips. In a moment, he was back in the old familiar world, where right is right and left is left. Again the subtle change wrought by Eve's magic lips had taken place.

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Eve went to a machine standing in a corner of the room.

"Come here and get behind me, John Northwood. I want to test it before he enters."

Northwood stood behind her shoulder.

"Now watch!" she ordered. "I shall turn it on one of those cages of guinea pigs over there."

She swung the projector around, pointed it at the cage of small, squealing animals, and threw a lever. Instantly a cone of black mephitis shot forth, a loathsome, bituminous stream of putrefaction that reeked of the grave and the cesspool, of the utmost reaches of decay before the dust accepts the disintegrated atoms. The first touch of seething, pitchy destruction brought screams of sudden agony from the guinea pigs, but the screams were cut short as the little animals fell in shocking, instant decay. The very cage which imprisoned them shriveled and

retreated from the hellish, devouring breath that struck its noisome rot into the heart of the wood and the metal, reducing both to revolting ruin.

Eve cut off the frightful power, and the black cone disappeared, leaving the room putrid with its defilement.

"And Adam would do that to the world," she said, her blue eyes like electric-shot icicles. "He would do it to you, John Northwood--and to me!" Her full bosom strained under the passion beneath.

"Listen!" She raised her hand warningly. "He comes! The destroyer comes!"

* * * * *

A hand was at the door. Eve reached for the lever, and, the same moment, Northwood leaned over her imploringly.

"If Athalia is with him!" he gasped. "You will not harm her?"

A wild shriek at the door, a slight scuffle, and then the doorknob was wrenched as though two were fighting over it.

"For God's sake, Eve!" implored Northwood. "Wait! Wait!"

"No! She shall die, too. You love her!"

Icy, cruel eyes cut into him, and a new-fleshed hand tried to push him aside. The door was straining open. A beloved voice shrieked. "John!"

Eve and Northwood both leaped for the lever. Under her tender white flesh she was as strong as a man. In the midst of the struggle, her red, humid lips approached his--closer. Closer. Their merest pressure would thrust him into Future Time, where the laboratory and all it contained would be but a shadow, and where he would be helpless to interfere with her terrible will.

He saw the door open and Adam stride into the room. Behind him, lying prone in the hall where she had probably fainted, was Athalia. In a mad burst of strength he touched the lever together with Eve.

The projector, belching forth its stinking breath of corruption swung in a mad arc over the ceiling, over the walls--and then straight at Adam.

Then, quicker than thought, came the accident. Eve, attempting to throw Northwood off, tripped, fell half over the machine, and, with a short scream of despair, dropped into the black path of destruction.

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Northwood paused, horrified. The Death Ray was pointed at an inner wall of the room, which, even as he looked, crumbled and disappeared, bringing down upon him dust more foul than any obscenity the bowels of the earth might yield. In an instant the black cone ate through the outer parts of the building, where crashing stone and screams that were more horrible because of their shortness followed the ruin that swept far into the fair reaches of the valley.

The paralyzing odor of decay took his breath, numbed his muscles, until, of all that huge building, the wall behind him and one small section of the room by the doorway alone remained whole. He was trying to nerve himself to reach for the lever close to that quiet formless thing still partly draped over the machine, when a faint sound in the door electrified him. At first, he dared not look, but his own name, spoken almost in a gasp, gave him courage.

Athalia lay on the floor, apparently untouched.

He jerked the lever violently before running to her, exultant with the knowledge that his own efforts to keep the ray from the door had saved her.

"And you're not hurt!" He gathered her close.

"John! I saw it get Adam." She pointed to a new mound of mouldy clothes on the floor. "Oh, it is hideous for me to be so glad, but he was going to destroy everything and everyone except me. He made the ray projector for that one purpose."

Northwood looked over the pile of putrid ruins which a few minutes ago had been a building. There was not a wall left intact.

"His intention is accomplished, Athalia," he said sadly. "Let's get out before more stones fall."

* * * * *

In a moment they were in the open. An ominous stillness seemed to grip the very air--the awful silence of the polar wastes which lay not far beyond the mountains.

"How dark it is, John!" cried Athalia. "Dark and cold!"

"The sunshine projector!" gasped Northwood. "It must have been destroyed. Look, dearest! The golden light has disappeared."

"And the warm air of the valley will lift immediately. That means a polar blizzard." She shuddered and clung closer to him. "I've seen Antarctic storms, John. They're death."

Northwood avoided her eyes. "There's the sun-ship. We'll give the ruins the once over in case there are any survivors; then we'll save ourselves."

Even a cursory examination of the mouldy piles of stone and dust convinced them that there could be no survivors. The ruins looked as though they had lain in those crumbling piles for centuries. Northwood, smothering his repugnance, stepped among them--among the green, slimy stones and the unspeakable revolting débris, staggering back and faint and shocked when he came upon dust that was once human.

"God!" he groaned, hands over eyes. "We're alone, Athalia! Alone in a charnal house. The laboratory housed the entire population, didn't it?"

"Yes. Needing no sleep nor food, we did not need houses. We all worked here, under Dr. Mundson's generalship, and, lately under Adam's, like a little band of soldiers fighting for a great cause."

"Let's go to the sun-ship, dearest."

"But Daddy Mundson was in the library," sobbed Athalia. "Let's look for him a little longer."

* * * * *

Sudden remembrance came to Northwood. "No, Athalia! He left the library. I saw him go down the jungle path several minutes before I and Eve went to Adam's laboratory."

"Then he might be safe!" Her eyes danced. "He might have gone to the sun-ship."

Shivering, she slumped against him. "Oh, John! I'm cold."

Her face was blue. Northwood jerked off his coat and wrapped it around her, taking the intense cold against his unprotected shoulders. The low, gray sky was rapidly darkening, and the feeble light of the sun could scarcely pierce the clouds. It was disturbing to know that even the summer temperature in the Antarctic was far below zero.

"Come, girl," said Northwood gravely. "Hurry! It's snowing."

They started to run down the road through the narrow strip of jungle. The Death Ray had cut huge swathes in the tangle of trees and vines, and now areas of heaped débris, livid with the colors of recent decay, exhaled a mephitic humidity altogether alien to the snow that fell in soft, slow flakes. Each hesitated to voice the new fear: had the sun-ship been destroyed?

By the time they reached the open field, the snow stung their flesh like sharp needles, but it was not yet thick enough to hide from them a hideous fact.

The sun-ship was gone.

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It might have occupied one of several black, foul areas on the green grass, where the searching Death Ray had made the very soil putrefy, and the rocks crumble into shocking dust.

Northwood snatched Athalia to him, too full of despair to speak. A sudden terrific flurry of snow whirled around them, and they were almost blown from their feet by the icy wind that tore over the unprotected field.

"It won't be long," said Athalia faintly. "Freezing doesn't hurt, John, dear."

"It isn't fair, Athalia! There never would have been such a marriage as ours. Dr. Mundson searched the world to bring us together."

"For scientific experiment!" she sobbed. "I'd rather die, John. I want an old-fashioned home, a Black Age family. I want to grow old with you and leave the earth to my children. Or else I want to die here now under

the kind, white blanket the snow is already spreading over us." She drooped in his arms.

Clinging together, they stood in the howling wind, looking at each other hungrily, as though they would snatch from death this one last picture of the other.

Northwood's freezing lips translated some of the futile words that crowded against them. "I love you because you are not perfect. I hate perfection!"

"Yes. Perfection is the only hopeless state, John. That is why Adam wanted to destroy, so that he might build again."

They were sitting in the snow now, for they were very tired. The storm began whistling louder, as though it were only a few feet above their heads.

"That sounds almost like the sun-ship," said Athalia drowsily.

"It's only the wind. Hold your face down so it won't strike your flesh so cruelly."

"I'm not suffering. I'm getting warm again." She smiled at him sleepily.

* * * * *

Little icicles began to form on their clothing, and the powdery snow frosted their uncovered hair.

Suddenly came a familiar voice: "_Ach Gott!_"

Dr. Mundson stood before them, covered with snow until he looked like a polar bear.

"Get up!" he shouted. "Quick! To the sun-ship!"

He seized Athalia and jerked her to her feet. She looked at him sleepily for a moment, and then threw herself at him and hugged him frantically.

"You're not dead?"

Taking each by the arm, he half dragged them to the sun-ship, which had landed only a few feet away. In a few minutes he had hot brandy for

them.

While they sipped greedily, he talked, between working the sun-ship's controls.

"No, I wouldn't say it was a lucky moment that drew me to the sun-ship. When I saw Eve trying to charm John, I had what you American slangists call a hunch, which sent me to the sun-ship to get it off the ground so that Adam couldn't commandeer it. And what is a hunch but a mental penetration into the Fourth Dimension?" For a long moment, he brooded, absent-minded. "I was in the air when the black ray, which I suppose is Adam's devilry, began to destroy everything it touched. From a safe elevation I saw it wreck all my work." A sudden spasm crossed his face. "I've flown over the entire valley. We're the only survivors--thank God!"

"And so at last you confess that it is not well to tamper with human life?" Northwood, warmed with hot brandy, was his old self again.

"Oh, I have not altogether wasted my efforts. I went to elaborate pains to bring together a perfect man and a perfect woman of what Adam called our Black Age." He smiled at them whimsically.

"And who can say to what extent you have thus furthered natural evolution?" Northwood slipped his arm around Athalia. "Our children might be more than geniuses, Doctor!"

Dr. Mundson nodded his huge, shaggy head gravely.

"The true instinct of a Creature of the Light," he declared.

THE HAUNTED PHOTOGRAPH

BY RUTH McENERY STUART

From *Harper's Bazar*, June, 1909

The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Humorous Ghost Stories**, by Dorothy Scarborough

To the ordinary observer it was just a common photograph of a cheap summer hotel. It hung sumptuously framed in plush, over the Widow Morris's mantel, the one resplendent note in an otherwise modest home, in a characteristic Queen Anne village.

One had only to see the rapt face of its owner as she sat in her weeds before the picture, which she tearfully pronounced "a strikin' likeness," to sympathize with the townsfolk who looked askance at the bereaved woman, even while they bore with her delusion, feeling sure that her sudden sorrow had set her mind agog.

When she had received the picture through the mail, some months before the fire which consumed the hotel--a fire through which she had not passed, but out of which she had come a widow--she proudly passed it around among the friends waiting with her at the post-office, replying to their questions as they admired it:

"Oh, yes! That's where he works--if you can call it work. He's the head steward in it. All that row o' winders where you see the awnin's down, they're his--an' them that ain't down, they're his, too--that is to say, it's his jurisdiction.

"You see, he's got the whip hand over the cook an' the sto'eroom, an' that key don't go out o' his belt unless he knows who's gettin' what--an' he's firm. Morris always was. He's like the iron law of the Ephesians."

"What key?"

It was an old lady who held the picture at arm's length, the more closely to scan it, who asked the question. She asked it partly to know, as neither man nor key appeared in the photograph, and partly to parry the "historic allusion"--a disturbing sort of fire for which Mrs. Morris was rather noted and which made some of her most loyal townsfolk a bit shy of her.

"Oh, I ain't referrin' to the picture," she hastened to explain. "I mean the keys that he always carries in his belt. The reg'lar joke there is

to call him 'St. Peter,' an' he takes it in good part, for, he declares, if there _is_ such a thing _as_ a similitude to the kingdom o' Heaven _in_ a hotel, why, it's in the providential supply department which, in a manner, hangs to his belt. He always humors a joke--'specially on himself."

No one will ever know through what painful periods of unrequited longing the Widow Morris had sought solace in this, her only cherished "relic," after the "half hour of sky-works" which had made her, in her own vernacular, "a lonely, conflagrated widow, with a heart full of ashes," before the glad moment when it was given her to discern in it an unsuspected and novel value. First had come, as a faint gleam of comfort, the reflection that although her dear lost one was not in evidence in the picture, he had really been inside the building when the photograph was taken, and so, of course, _he must be in there yet_!

At first she experienced a slight disappointment that her man was not visible, at door or window. But it was only a passing regret. It was really better to feel him surely and broadly within--at large in the great house, free to pass at will from one room to another. To have had him fixed, no matter how effectively, would have been a limitation. As it was, she pressed the picture to her bosom as she wondered if, perchance, he would not some day come out of his hiding to meet her.

It was a muffled pleasure and tremulously entertained at first, but the very whimsicality of it was an appeal to her sensitized imagination, and so, when finally the thing did really happen, it is small wonder that it came somewhat as a shock.

It appears that one day, feeling particularly lonely and forlorn, and having no other comfort, she was pressing her tear-stained face against the row of window-shutters in the room without awnings, this being her nearest approach to the alleged occupant's bosom, when she was suddenly startled by a peculiar swishing sound, as of wind-blown rain, whereupon she lifted her face to perceive that it was indeed raining, and then, glancing back at the photograph, she distinctly saw her husband rushing from one window to another, drawing down the sashes on the side of the house that would have been exposed to the real shower whose music was in her ears.

This was a great discovery, and, naturally enough, it set her weeping, for, she sobbed, it made her feel, for a minute, that she had lost her widowhood and that, after the shower, he'd be coming home.

It might well make any one cry to suddenly lose the pivot upon which his emotions are swung. At any rate, Mrs. Morris cried. She said that she cried all night, first because it seemed so spooky to see him whose remains she had so recently buried on faith, waiving recognition in the débris, dashing about now in so matter-of-fact a way.

And then she wept because, after all, he did not come.

This was the formal beginning of her sense of personal companionship in the picture--companionship, yes, of delight in it, for there is even delight in tears--in some situations in life. Especially is this true of one whose emotions are her only guides, as seems to have been the case with the Widow Morris.

After seeing him draw the window-sashes--and he had drawn them _down_, ignoring her presence--she sat for hours, waiting for the rain to stop. It seemed to have set in for a long spell, for when she finally fell asleep, "from sheer disappointment, 'long towards morning," it was still raining, but when she awoke the sun shone and all the windows in the picture were up again.

This was a misleading experience, however, for she soon discovered that she could not count upon any line of conduct by the man in the hotel, as the fact that it had one time rained in the photograph at the same time that it rained outside was but a coincidence and she was soon surprised to perceive all quiet along the hotel piazza, not even an awning flapping, while the earth, on her plane, was torn by storms.

On one memorable occasion when her husband had appeared, flapping the window-panes from within with a towel, she had thought for one brief moment that he was beckoning to her, and that she might have to go to him, and she was beginning to experience terror, with shortness of breath and other premonitions of sudden passing, when she discovered that he was merely killing flies, and she flurriedly fanned herself with the asbestos mat which she had seized from the stove beside her, and staggered out to a seat under the mulberries, as she stammered:

"I do declare, Morris'll be the death of me yet. He's 'most as much care to me dead as he was alive--I made sure--made sure he'd come after me!"

Then, feeling her own fidelity challenged, she hastened to add:

"Not that I hadn't rather go to him than to take any trip in the world, but--but I never did fancy that hotel, and since I've got used to seein'

him there so constant, I feel sure that's where we'd put up. My belief is, anyway, that if there's hereafters for some things, there's hereafters for all. From what I can gather, I reckon I'm a kind of a cross between a Swedenborgian and a Gates-ajar--that, of course, engrafted on to a Methodist. Now, that hotel, when it was consumed by fire, which to it was the same as mortal death, why, it either ascended into Heaven, in smoke, or it fell, in ashes--to the other place. If it died worthy, like as not it's undergoin' repairs now for a 'mansion,' jasper cupalos, an'--but, of course, such as that could be run up in a twinklin'.

"Still, from what I've heard, it's more likely gone _down_ to its deserts. It would seem hard for a hotel with so many awned-off corridors an' palmed embrasures with teet-a-teet sofas, to live along without sin."

She stood on her step-ladder, wiping the face of the picture as she spoke, and as she began to back down she discovered the cat under her elbow, glaring at the picture.

"Yes, Kitty! Spit away!" she exclaimed. "Like as not you see even more than I do!"

And as she slipped the ladder back into the closet, she remarked--this to herself, strictly:

"If it hadn't 'a' been for poor puss, I'd 'a' had a heap more pleasure out o' this picture than what I have had--or will be likely to have again. The way she's taken on, I've almost come to hate it!"

A serpent had entered her poor little Eden--even the green-eyed monster constrictor, who, if given full swing, would not spare a bone of her meager comfort.

A neighbor who chanced to come in at the time, unobserved overheard the last remark, and Mrs. Morris, seeing that she was there, continued in an unchanged tone, while she gave her a chair:

"Of course, Mis' Withers, you can easy guess who I refer to. I mean that comby-featured wench that kep' the books an' answered the telephone at the hotel--when she found the time from her meddlin'. Somehow, I never thought about her bein' _burned in_ with Morris till puss give her away. Puss never did like the girl when she was alive, an' the first time I see her scratch an' spit at the picture, just the way she used to do

whenever _she_ come in sight, why, it just struck me like a clap o' thunder out of a clear sky that puss knew who she was a-spittin' at--an' I switched around sudden--an' glanced up sudden--an'----

"Well, what I seen, I seen! There was that beautied-up typewriter settin' in the window-sill o' Morris's butler's pantry--an' if she didn't wink at me malicious, then I don't know malice when I see it. An' she used her fingers against her nose, too, most defiant and impolite. So I says to puss I says, 'Puss,' I says, 'there's _goin's on_ in that hotel, sure as fate. Annabel Bender has got the better o' me, for once!' An', tell the truth, it did spoil the photograph for me for a while, for, of course, after that, if I didn't see him somewheres on the watch for his faithful spouse, I'd say to myself, 'He's inside there with that pink-featured hussy!'

"You know, a man's a man, Mis' Withers--'specially Morris, an' with his lawful wife cut off an' indefinitely divorced by a longevitied family--an' another burned in with him--well, his faithfulness is put to a trial by fire, as you might say. So, as I say, it spoiled the picture for me, for a while.

"An', to make matters worse, it wasn't any time before I recollected that Campbellite preacher thet was burned in with them, an' with that my imagination run riot, an' I'd think to myself, '_If_ they're inclined, they cert'n'y have things handy!' Then I'd ketch myself an' say, 'Where's your faith in Scripture, Mary Marthy Matthews, named after two Bible women an' born daughter to an apostle? What's the use?' I'd say, an' so, first an' last, I'd get a sort o' alpha an' omega comfort out o' the passage about no givin' in marriage. Still, there'd be times, pray as I would, when them three would loom up, him an' her--_an'_ the Campbellite preacher. I know his license to marry would run out _in time_, but for eternity, of course we don't know. Seem like everything would last forever--an' then again, if I've got a widow's freedom, Morris must be classed as a widower, if he's anything.

"Then I'd get some relief in thinkin' about his disposition. Good as he was, Morris was fickle-tasted, not in the long run, but day in an' day out, an' even if he'd be taken up with her he'd get a distaste the minute he reelized she'd be there interminable. That's Morris. Why, didn't he used to get nervous just seein' _me_ around, an' me his own selected? An' didn't I use to make some excuse to send him over to Mame Maddern's ma's ma's--so's he'd be harmlessly diverted? She was full o' talk, and she was ninety-odd an' asthmatic, but he'd come home from them visits an' call me his child wife. I've had my happy moments!

"You know a man'll get tired of himself, even, if he's condemned to it too continual, and think of that blondinette typewriter for a steady diet--to a man like Morris! Imagine her when her hair dye started to give out--green streaks in that pompadour! So, knowin' my man, I'd take courage an' I'd think, 'Seein' me cut off, he'll soon be wantin' me more than ever'--an' so he does. It's got so now that, glance up at that hotel any time I will, I can generally find him on the lookout, an' many's the time I've stole in an' put on a favoryte apron o' his with blue bows on it, when we'd be alone an' nobody to remark about me breakin' my mournin'. Dear me, how full o' b'oyancy he was--a regular boy at thirty-five, when he passed away!"

Was it any wonder that her friends exchanged glances while Mrs. Morris entertained them in so droll a way? Still, as time passed and she not only brightened in the light of her delusion, but proceeded to meet the conditions of her own life by opening a small shop in her home, and when she exhibited a wholesome sense of profit and loss, her neighbors were quite ready to accept her on terms of mental responsibility.

With occupation and a modest success, emotional disturbance was surely giving place to an even calm, when, one day, something happened.

Mrs. Morris sat behind her counter, sorting notions, puss asleep beside her, when she heard the swish of thin silk, with a breath of familiar perfume, and, looking up, whom did she see but the blond lady of her troubled dreams striding bodily up to the counter, smiling as she swished.

At the sight the good woman first rose to her feet, and then as suddenly dropped--flopped--breathless and white--backward--and had to be revived, so that for the space of some minutes things happened very fast--that is, if we may believe the flurried testimony of the blonde, who, in going over it, two hours later, had more than once to stop for breath.

"Well, say!" she panted. "Did you ever! _Such_ a turn as took her! I hadn't no more 'n stepped in the door when she succumbed, green as the Ganges, into her own egg-basket--an' it full! An' she was on the eve o' floppin' back into the prunin' scizzor points up, when I scrambled over the counter, breakin' my straight-front in two, which she's welcome to, poor thing! Then I loaned her my smellin'-salts, which she held her breath against until it got to be a case of smell or die, an' she smelt! Then it was a case of temporary spasms for a minute, the salts spillin' out over her face, but when the accident evaporated, an' she

opened her eyes, rational, I thought to myself, 'Maybe she don't know she's keeled an' would be humiliated if she did,' so I acted callous, an' I says, offhand like, I says, pushin' her apron around behind her over its _vice versa_, so's to cover up the eggs, which I thought had better be broke to her gently, I says, 'I just called in, Mis' Morris, to borry your recipe for angel-cake--or maybe get you to bake one for us' (I knew she baked on orders). An' with that, what does she do but go over again, limp as wet starch, down an' through every egg in that basket, solid _an'_ fluid!

"Well, by this time, a man who had seen her at her first worst an' run for a doctor, he come in with three, an' whilst they were bowin' to each other an' backin', I giv' 'er stimulus an' d'rectly she turned upon me one rememberable gaze, an' she says, 'Doctors,' says she, 'would you think they'd have the gall to try to get me to cook for 'em? They've ordered angel-ca----' An' with that, over she toppled again, no pulse nor nothin', same as the dead!"

While the blonde talked she busied herself with her loosely falling locks, which she tried vainly to entrap.

"An' yet you say she ain't classed as crazy? I'd say it of her, sure! An' so old Morris is dead--burned in that old hotel! Well, well! Poor old fellow! Dear old place! What times I've had!"

She spoke through a mouthful of gilt hairpins and her voice was as an Æolian harp.

"An' he burned in it--an' she's a widow yet! Yes, I did hear there'd been a fire, but you never can tell. I thought the chimney might 'a' burned out--an' I was in the thick of bein' engaged to the night clerk at the Singin' Needles Hotel at Pineville at the time--an' there's no regular mail there. I thought the story might be exaggerated. Oh no, I didn't marry the night clerk. I'm a bride now, married to the head steward, same rank as poor old Morris--an' we're just _as_ happy! I used to pleg Morris about _her_ hair, but I'd have to let up on that now. Mine's as red again as hers. No, not my hair--_mine's_ hair. It's as red as a flannen drawer, every bit an' grain!

"But, say," she added, presently, "when she gets better, just tell her never mind about that reci-pe. I copied it out of her reci-pe book whilst she was under the weather, an' dropped a dime in her cash-drawer. I recollect how old Morris used to look forward to her angel-cakes week-ends he'd be goin' home, an' you know there's nothin' like havin'

ammunition, in marriage, even if you never need it. Mine's in that frame of mind now that transforms my gingerbread into angel-cake, but the time may come when I'll have to beat my eggs to a fluff even for angel-cake, so's not to have it taste like gingerbread to him.

"Oh no, he's not with me this trip. I just run down for a lark to show my folks my ring an' things, an' let 'em see it's really so. He give me considerable jewelry. His First's taste run that way, an' they ain't no children.

"Yes, this amethyst is the weddin'-ring. I selected that on account of him bein' a widower. It's the nearest I'd come to wearin' second mournin' for a woman I can't exactly grieve after. The year not bein' up is why he stayed home this trip. He didn't like to be seen traversin' the same old haunts with Another till it _was_ up. I wouldn't wait because, tell the truth, I was afraid. He ain't like a married man with me about money yet, an' it's liable to seize him any day. He might say that he couldn't afford the trip, or that we couldn't, which would amount to the same thing. I rather liked him bein' a little ticklish about goin' around with me for a while. It's one thing to do a thing an' another to be brazen about it--it----

"But if she don't get better"--the reversion was to the Widow Morris--"if she don't get her mind poor thing! there's a fine insane asylum just out of Pineville, an' I'd like the best in the world to look out for her. It would make an excuse for me to go in. They say they have high old times there. Some days they let the inmates do 'most any old thing that's harmless. They even give 'em unpoisonous paints an' let 'em paint each other up. One man insisted he was a barber-pole an' ringed himself accordingly, an' then another chased him around for a stick of peppermint candy. Think of all that inside a close fence, an' a town so dull an' news-hungry----

"Yes, they say Thursdays is paint days, an', of course, Fridays, they are scrub days. They pass around turpentine an' hide the matches. But, of course, Mis' Morris may get the better of it. 'Tain' every woman that can stand widowin', an' sometimes them that has got the least out of marriage will seem the most deprived to lose it--so they say."

The blonde was a person of words.

* * * * *

When Mrs. Morris had fully revived and, after a restoring "night's

sleep" had got her bearings, and when she realized clearly that her supposed rival had actually shown up in the flesh, she visibly braced up. Her neighbors understood that it must have been a shock "to be suddenly confronted with any souvenir of the hotel fire"--so one had expressed it--and the incident soon passed out of the village mind.

It was not long after this incident that the widow confided to a friend that she was coming to depend upon Morris for advice in her business.

"Standing as he does, in that hotel door--between two worlds, as you might say--why, he sees both ways, and oftentimes he'll detect an event _on the way to happening_, an' if it don't move too fast, why, I can hustle an' get the better of things." It was as if she had a private wire for advance information--and she declared herself happy.

Indeed, a certain ineffable light such as we sometimes see in the eyes of those newly in love came to shine from the face of the widow, who did not hesitate to affirm, looking into space as she said it:

"Takin' all things into consideration, I can truly say that I have never been so truly and ideely married as since my widowhood." And she smiled as she added:

"Marriage, the earthly way, is vicissitudinous, for everybody knows that anything is liable to happen to a man at large."

There had been a time when she lamented that her picture was not "life-sized" as it would seem so much more natural, but she immediately reflected that that hotel would never have gotten into her little house, and that, after all, the main thing was having "him" under her own roof.

As the months passed Mrs. Morris, albeit she seemed serene and of peaceful mind, grew very white and still. Fire is white in its ultimate intensity. The top, spinning its fastest, is said to "sleep"--and the dancing dervish is "still." So, misleading signs sometimes mark the danger-line.

"Under-eating and over-thinking" was what the doctor said while he felt her translucent wrist and prescribed nails in her drinking-water. If he secretly knew that kind nature was gently letting down the bars so that a waiting spirit might easily pass--well, he was a doctor, not a minister. His business was with the body, and he ordered repairs.

She was only thirty-seven and "well" when she passed painlessly out of

life. It seemed to be simply a case of going.

There were several friends at her bedside the night she went, and to them she turned, feeling the time come:

"I just wanted to give out that the first thing I intend to do when I'm relieved is to call by there for Morris"--she lifted her weary eyes to the picture as she spoke--"for Morris--and I want it understood that it'll be a vacant house from the minute I depart. So, if there's any other woman that's calculatin' to have any carryin's-on from them windows--why, she'll be disappointed--she or they. The one obnoxious person I thought was in it _wasn't_. My imagination was tempted of Satan an' I was misled. So it must be sold for just what it is--just a photographer's photograph. If it's a picture with a past, why, everybody knows what that past is, and will respect it. I have tried to conquer myself enough to bequeath it to the young lady I suspicioned, but human nature is frail, an' I can't quite do it, although doubtless she would like it as a souvenir. Maybe she'd find it a little too souvenirish to suit my wifely taste, and yet--if a person is going to die----

"I suppose I might legate it to her, partly to recompense her for her discretion in leaving that hotel when she did--an' partly for undue suspicion----

"There's a few debts to be paid, but there's eggs an' things that'll pay them, an' there's no need to have the hen settin' in the window showcase any longer. It was a good advertisement, but I've often thought it might be embarrassin' to her." She was growing weaker, but she roused herself to amend:

"Better raffle the picture for a dollar a chance an' let the proceeds go to my funeral--an' I want to be buried in the hotel-fire general grave, commingled with him--an' what's left over after the debts are paid, I bequeath to _her_--to make amends--an' if she don't care to come for it, let every widow in town draw for it. But she'll come. 'Most any woman'll take any trip, if it's paid for--But look!" she raised her eyes excitedly toward the mantel, "Look! What's that he's wavin'? It looks--oh yes, it is--it's our wings--two pairs--mine a little smaller. I s'pose it'll be the same old story--I'll never be able to keep up--to keep up with him--an' I've been so hap----

"Yes, Morris--I'm comin'----"

And she was gone--into a peaceful sleep from which she easily passed

just before dawn.

When all was well over, the sitting women rose with one accord and went to the mantel, where one even lighted an extra candle more clearly to scan the mysterious picture.

Finally one said:

"You may think I'm queer, but it does look different to me already!"

"So it does," said another, taking the candle. "Like a house for rent. I declare, it gives me the cold shivers."

"I'll pay my dollar gladly, and take a chance for it," whispered a third, "but I wouldn't let such a thing as that enter my happy home----"

"Neither would I!"

"Nor me, neither. I've had trouble enough. My husband's first wife's portrait has brought me discord enough--an' it was a straight likeness. I don't want any more pictures to put in the hen-house loft."

So the feeling ran among the wives.

"Well," said she who was blowing out the candle, "I'll draw for it--an' take it if I win it, an' consider it a sort of inheritance. I never inherited anything but indigestion."

The last speaker was a maiden lady, and so was she who answered, chuckling:

"That's what I say! Anything for a change. There'd be some excitement in a picture where a man was liable to show up. It's more than I've got now. I do declare it's just scandalous the way we're gigglin', an' the poor soul hardly out o' hearin'. She had a kind heart, Mis' Morris had, an' she made herself happy with a mighty slim chance----"

"Yes, she did--and I only wish there'd been a better man waitin' for her in that hotel."

A SHADY PLOT, by Elsie Brown

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Humorous Ghost Stories**, by Dorothy Scarborough

So I sat down to write a ghost story.

Jenkins was responsible.

"Hallock," he had said to me, "give us another on the supernatural this time. Something to give 'em the horrors; that's what the public wants, and your ghosts are live propositions."

Well, I was in no position to contradict Jenkins, for, as yet, his magazine had been the only one to print my stuff. So I had said, "Precisely!" in the deepest voice I was capable of, and had gone out.

I hadn't the shade of an idea, but at the time that didn't worry me in the least. You see, I had often been like that before and in the end things had always come my way--I didn't in the least know how or why. It had all been rather mysterious. You understand I didn't specialize in ghost stories, but more or less they seemed to specialize in me. A ghost story had been the first fiction I had written. Curious how that idea for a plot had come to me out of nowhere after I had chased inspiration in vain for months! Even now whenever Jenkins wanted a ghost, he called on me. And I had never found it healthy to contradict Jenkins. Jenkins always seemed to have an uncanny knowledge as to when the landlord or the grocer were pestering me, and he dunned me for a ghost. And somehow I'd always been able to dig one up for him, so I'd begun to get a bit cocky as to my ability.

So I went home and sat down before my desk and sucked at the end of my pencil and waited, but nothing happened. Pretty soon my mind began to wander off on other things, decidedly unghostly and material things, such as my wife's shopping and how on earth I was going to cure her of her alarming tendency to take every new fad that came along and work it to death. But I realized _that_ would never get me any place, so I went back to staring at the ceiling.

"This writing business _is_ delightful, isn't it?" I said sarcastically at last, out loud, too. You see, I had reached the stage of imbecility when I was talking to myself.

"Yes," said a voice at the other end of the room, "I should say it is!"

I admit I jumped. Then I looked around.

It was twilight by this time and I had forgotten to turn on the lamp. The other end of the room was full of shadows and furniture. I sat staring at it and presently noticed something just taking shape. It was exactly like watching one of these moving picture cartoons being put together. First an arm came out, then a bit of sleeve of a stiff white shirtwaist, then a leg and a plaid skirt, until at last there she was complete,--whoever she was.

She was long and angular, with enormous fishy eyes behind big bone-rimmed spectacles, and her hair in a tight wad at the back of her head (yes, I seemed able to see right through her head) and a jaw--well, it looked so solid that for the moment I began to doubt my very own senses and believe she was real after all.

She came over and stood in front of me and glared--yes, positively glared down at me, although (to my knowledge) I had never laid eyes on the woman before, to say nothing of giving her cause to look at me like that.

I sat still, feeling pretty helpless I can tell you, and at last she barked:

"What are you gaping at?"

I swallowed, though I hadn't been chewing anything.

"Nothing," I said. "Absolutely nothing. My dear lady, I was merely waiting for you to tell me why you had come. And excuse me, but do you always come in sections like this? I should think your parts might get mixed up sometimes."

"Didn't you send for me?" she crisped.

Imagine how I felt at that!

"Why, no. I--I don't seem to remember----"

"Look here. Haven't you been calling on heaven and earth all afternoon to help you write a story?"

I nodded, and then a possible explanation occurred to me and my spine got cold. Suppose this was the ghost of a stenographer applying for a job! I had had an advertisement in the paper recently. I opened my mouth

to explain that the position was filled, and permanently so, but she stopped me.

"And when I got back to the office from my last case and was ready for you, didn't you switch off to something else and sit there driveling so I couldn't attract your attention until just now?"

"I--I'm very sorry, really."

"Well, you needn't be, because I just came to tell you to stop bothering us for assistance; you ain't going to get it. We're going on Strike!"

"What!"

"You don't have to yell at me."

"I--I didn't mean to yell," I said humbly. "But I'm afraid I didn't quite understand you. You said you were----"

"Going on strike. Don't you know what a strike is? Not another plot do you get from us!"

I stared at her and wet my lips.

"Is--is that where they've been coming from?"

"Of course. Where else?"

"But my ghosts aren't a bit like you----"

"If they were people wouldn't believe in them." She draped herself on the top of my desk among the pens and ink bottles and leaned towards me.

"In the other life I used to write."

"You did!"

She nodded.

"But that has nothing to do with my present form. It might have, but I gave it up at last for that very reason, and went to work as a reader on a magazine." She sighed, and rubbed the end of her long eagle nose with a reminiscent finger. "Those were terrible days; the memory of them made me mistake purgatory for paradise, and at last when I attained my present state of being, I made up my mind that something should be done.

I found others who had suffered similarly, and between us we organized 'The Writer's Inspiration Bureau.' We scout around until we find a writer without ideas and with a mind soft enough to accept impression. The case is brought to the attention of the main office, and one of us assigned to it. When that case is finished we bring in a report."

"But I never saw you before----"

"And you wouldn't have this time if I hadn't come to announce the strike. Many a time I've leaned on your shoulder when you've thought _you_ were thinking hard--" I groaned, and clutched my hair. The very idea of that horrible scarecrow so much as touching me! and wouldn't my wife be shocked! I shivered. "But," she continued, "that's at an end. We've been called out of our beds a little too often in recent years, and now we're through."

"But my dear madam, I assure you I have had nothing to do with that. I hope I'm properly grateful and all that, you see."

"Oh, it isn't you," she explained patronizingly. "It's those Ouija board fanatics. There was a time when we had nothing much to occupy us and used to haunt a little on the side, purely for amusement, but not any more. We've had to give up haunting almost entirely. We sit at a desk and answer questions now. And such questions!"

She shook her head hopelessly, and taking off her glasses wiped them, and put them back on her nose again.

"But what have I got to do with this?"

She gave me a pitying look and rose.

"You're to exert your influence. Get all your friends and acquaintances to stop using the Ouija board, and then we'll start helping you to write."

"But----"

There was a footstep outside my door.

"John! Oh, John!" called the voice of my wife.

I waved my arms at the ghost with something of the motion of a beginner when learning to swim.

"Madam, I must ask you to leave, and at once. Consider the impression if you were seen here----"

The ghost nodded, and began, very sensibly, I thought, to demobilize and evaporate. First the brogans on her feet grew misty until I could see the floor through them, then the affection spread to her knees and gradually extended upward. By this time my wife was opening the door.

"Don't forget the strike," she repeated, while her lower jaw began to disintegrate, and as my Lavinia crossed the room to me the last vestige of her ear faded into space.

"John, why in the world are you sitting in the dark?"

"Just--thinking, my dear."

"Thinking, rubbish! You were talking out loud."

I remained silent while she lit the lamps, thankful that her back was turned to me. When I am nervous or excited there is a muscle in my face that starts to twitch, and this pulls up one corner of my mouth and gives the appearance of an idiotic grin. So far I had managed to conceal this affliction from Lavinia.

"You know I bought the loveliest thing this afternoon. Everybody's wild over them!"

I remembered her craze for taking up new fads and a premonitory chill crept up the back of my neck.

"It--it isn't----" I began and stopped. I simply couldn't ask; the possibility was too horrible.

"You'd never guess in the world. It's the duckiest, darlingest Ouija board, and so cheap! I got it at a bargain sale. Why, what's the matter, John?"

I felt things slipping.

"Nothing," I said, and looked around for the ghost. Suppose she had lingered, and upon hearing what my wife had said should suddenly appear----Like all sensitive women, Lavinia was subject to hysterics.

"But you looked so funny----"

"I--I always do when I'm interested," I gulped. "But don't you think that was a foolish thing to buy?"

"Foolish! Oh, John! Foolish! And after me getting it for you!"

"For me! What do you mean?"

"To help you write your stories. Why, for instance, suppose you wanted to write an historical novel. You wouldn't have to wear your eyes out over those musty old books in the public library. All you'd have to do would be to get out your Ouija and talk to Napoleon, or William the Conqueror, or Helen of Troy--well, maybe not Helen--anyhow you'd have all the local color you'd need, and without a speck of trouble. And think how easy writing your short stories will be now."

"But Lavinia, you surely don't believe in Ouija boards."

"I don't know, John--they are awfully thrilling."

She had seated herself on the arm of my chair and was looking dreamily across the room. I started and turned around. There was nothing there, and I sank back with relief. So far so good.

"Oh, certainly, they're thrilling all right. That's just it, they're a darn sight too thrilling. They're positively devilish. Now, Lavinia, you have plenty of sense, and I want you to get rid of that thing just as soon as you can. Take it back and get something else."

My wife crossed her knees and stared at me through narrowed lids.

"John Hallock," she said distinctly. "I don't propose to do anything of the kind. In the first place they won't exchange things bought at a bargain sale, and in the second, if you aren't interested in the other world _I_ am. So there!" and she slid down and walked from the room before I could think of a single thing to say. She walked very huffily.

Well, it was like that all the rest of the evening. Just as soon as I mentioned Ouija boards I felt things begin to cloud up; so I decided to let it go for the present, in the hope that she might be more reasonable later.

After supper I had another try at the writing, but as my mind continued

a perfect blank I gave it up and went off to bed.

The next day was Saturday, and it being near the end of the month and a particularly busy day, I left home early without seeing Lavinia. Understand, I haven't quite reached the point where I can give my whole time to writing, and being bookkeeper for a lumber company does help with the grocery bills and pay for Lavinia's fancy shopping. Friday had been a half holiday, and of course when I got back the work was piled up pretty high; so high, in fact, that ghosts and stories and everything else vanished in a perfect tangle of figures.

When I got off the street car that evening my mind was still churning. I remember now that I noticed, even from the corner, how brightly the house was illuminated, but at the time that didn't mean anything to me. I recall as I went up the steps and opened the door I murmured:

"Nine times nine is eighty-one!"

And then Gladolia met me in the hall.

"Misto Hallock, de Missus sho t'inks you's lost! She say she done 'phone you dis mawnin' to be home early, but fo' de lawd's sake not to stop to argify now, but get ready fo' de company an' come on down."

Some memory of a message given me by one of the clerks filtered back through my brain, but I had been hunting three lost receipts at the time, and had completely forgotten it.

"Company?" I said stupidly. "What company?"

"De Missus's Ouija boahrd pahrtty," said Gladolia, and rolling her eyes she disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

I must have gone upstairs and dressed and come down again, for I presently found myself standing in the dimly lighted lower hall wearing my second best suit and a fresh shirt and collar. But I have no recollections of the process.

There was a great chattering coming from our little parlor and I went over to the half-opened door and peered through.

The room was full of women--most of them elderly--whom I recognized as belonging to my wife's Book Club. They were sitting in couples, and between each couple was a Ouija board! The mournful squeak of the legs

of the moving triangular things on which they rested their fingers filled the air and mixed in with the conversation. I looked around for the ghost with my heart sunk down to zero. What if Lavinia should see her and go mad before my eyes! And then my wife came and tapped me on the shoulder.

"John," she said in her sweetest voice, and I noticed that her cheeks were very pink and her eyes very bright. My wife is never so pretty as when she's doing something she knows I disapprove of, "John, dear I know you'll help us out. Mrs. William Augustus Wainright 'phoned at the last moment to say that she couldn't possibly come, and that leaves poor Laura Hinkle without a partner. Now, John, I know _some_ people can work a Ouija by themselves, but Laura can't, and she'll just have a horrible time unless you----"

"Me!" I gasped. "Me! I won't----" but even as I spoke she had taken my arm, and the next thing I knew I was sitting with the thing on my knees and Miss Laura Hinkle opposite, grinning in my face like a flirtatious crocodile.

"I--I won't----" I began.

"Now, Mr. Hallock, don't you be shy." Miss Laura Hinkle leaned forward and shook a bony finger almost under my chin.

"I--I'm not! Only I say I won't----!"

"No, it's very easy, really. You just put the tips of your fingers right here beside the tips of my fingers----"

And the first thing I knew she had taken my hands and was coyly holding them in the position desired. She released them presently, and the little board began to slide around in an aimless sort of way. There seemed to be some force tugging it about. I looked at my partner, first with suspicion, and then with a vast relief. If she was doing it, then all that talk about spirits----Oh, I did hope Miss Laura Hinkle was cheating with that board!

"Ouija, dear, won't you tell us something?" she cooed, and on the instant the thing seemed to take life.

It rushed to the upper left hand corner of the board and hovered with its front leg on the word "Yes." Then it began to fly around so fast that I gave up any attempt to follow it. My companion was bending

forward and had started to spell out loud:

"T-r-a-i-t-o-r.' Traitor! Why, what does she mean?"

"I don't know," I said desperately. My collar felt very tight.

"But she must mean something. Ouija, dear, won't you explain yourself more fully?"

"A-s-k-h-i-m!' Ask him. Ask who, Ouija?"

"I--I'm going." I choked and tried to get up but my fingers seemed stuck to that dreadful board and I dropped back again.

Apparently Miss Hinkle had not heard my protest. The thing was going around faster than ever and she was reading the message silently, with her brow corrugated, and the light of the huntress in her pale blue eyes.

"Why, she says it's you, Mr. Hallock. What _does_ she mean? Ouija, won't you tell us who is talking?"

I groaned, but that inexorable board continued to spell. I always did hate a spelling match! Miss Hinkle was again following it aloud:

"H-e-l-e-n.' Helen!" She raised her voice until it could be heard at the other end of the room. "Lavinia, dear, do you know anyone by the name of Helen?"

"By the name of----? I can't hear you." And my wife made her way over to us between the Book Club's chairs.

"You know the funniest thing has happened," she whispered excitedly. "Someone had been trying to communicate with John through Mrs. Hunt's and Mrs. Sprinkle's Ouija! Someone by the name of Helen----"

"Why, _isn't_ that curious!"

"What is?"

Miss Hinkle simpered.

"Someone giving the name of Helen has just been calling for your husband here."

"But we don't know anyone by the name of Helen----"

Lavinia stopped and began to look at me through narrowed lids much as she had done in the library the evening before.

And then from different parts of the room other manipulators began to report. Every plagued one of those five Ouija boards was calling me by name! I felt my ears grow crimson, purple, maroon. My wife was looking at me as though I were some peculiar insect. The squeak of Ouija boards and the murmur of conversation rose louder and louder, and then I felt my face twitch in the spasm of that idiotic grin. I tried to straighten my wretched features into their usual semblance of humanity, I tried and----

"Doesn't he look sly!" said Miss Hinkle. And then I got up and fled from the room.

I do not know how that party ended. I do not want to know. I went straight upstairs, and undressed and crawled into bed, and lay there in the burning dark while the last guest gurgled in the hall below about the wonderful evening she had spent. I lay there while the front door shut after her, and Lavinia's steps came up the stairs and--passed the door to the guest room beyond. And then after a couple of centuries elapsed the clock struck three and I dozed off to sleep.

At the breakfast table the next morning there was no sign of my wife. I concluded she was sleeping late, but Gladolia, upon being questioned, only shook her head, muttered something, and turned the whites of her eyes up to the ceiling. I was glad when the meal was over and hurried to the library for another try at that story.

I had hardly seated myself at the desk when there came a tap at the door and a white slip of paper slid under it. I unfolded it and read:

"DEAR JOHN,

"I am going back to my grandmother. My lawyer will communicate with you later."

"Oh," I cried. "Oh, I wish I was dead!"

And:

"That's exactly what you ought to be!" said that horrible voice from the other end of the room.

I sat up abruptly--I had sunk into a chair under the blow of the letter--then I dropped back again and my hair rose in a thick prickle on the top of my head. Coming majestically across the floor towards me was a highly polished pair of thick laced shoes. I stared at them in a sort of dreadful fascination, and then something about their gait attracted my attention and I recognized them.

"See here," I said sternly. "What do you mean by appearing here like this?"

"_I_ can't help it," said the voice, which seemed to come from a point about five and a half feet above the shoes. I raised my eyes and presently distinguished her round protruding mouth.

"Why can't you? A nice way to act, to walk in sections----"

"If you'll give me time," said the mouth in an exasperated voice, "I assure you the rest of me will presently arrive."

"But what's the matter with you? You never acted this way before."

She seemed stung to make a violent effort, for a portion of a fishy eye and the end of her nose popped into view with a suddenness that made me jump.

"It's all your fault." She glared at me, while part of her hair and her plaid skirt began slowly to take form.

"My fault!"

"Of course. How can you keep a lady up working all night and then expect her to retain all her faculties the next day? I'm just too tired to materialize."

"Then why did you bother?"

"Because I was sent to ask when your wife is going to get rid of that Ouija board."

"How should I know! I wish to heaven I'd never seen you!" I cried. "Look what you've done! You've lost me my wife, you've lost me my home and

happiness, you've----you've----"

"Misto Hallock," came from the hall outside, "Misto Hallock, I's gwine t' quit. I don't like no hoodoos." And the steps retreated.

"You've----you've lost me my cook----"

"I didn't come here to be abused," said the ghost coldly. "I--I----"

And then the door opened and Lavinia entered. She wore the brown hat and coat she usually travels in and carried a suitcase which she set down on the floor.

That suitcase had an air of solid finality about it, and its lock leered at me brassily.

I leaped from my chair with unaccustomed agility and sprang in front of my wife. I must conceal that awful phantom from her, at any risk!

She did not look at me, or--thank heaven!--behind me, but fixed her injured gaze upon the waste-basket, as if to wrest dark secrets from it.

"I have come to tell you that I am leaving," she staccatoed.

"Oh, yes, yes!" I agreed, flapping my arms about to attract attention from the corner. "That's fine--great!"

"So you want me to go, do you?" she demanded.

"Sure, yes--right away! Change of air will do you good. I'll join you presently!" If only she would go till Helen could _de_-part! I'd have the devil of a time explaining afterward, of course, but anything would be better than to have Lavinia see a ghost. Why, that sensitive little woman couldn't bear to have a mouse say boo at her--and what would she say to a ghost in her own living-room?

Lavinia cast a cold eye upon me. "You are acting very queerly," she sniffed. "You are concealing something from me."

Just then the door opened and Gladolia called, "Mis' Hallock! Mis' Hallock! I've come to tell you I'se done lef' dis place."

My wife turned her head a moment. "But why, Gladolia?"

"I ain't stayin' round no place 'long wid dem Ouija board contraptions. I's skeered of hoodoos. I's done gone, I is."

"Is that all you've got to complain about?" Lavinia inquired.

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right, then. Go back to the kitchen. You can use the board for kindling wood."

"Who? Me touch dat t'ing? No, ma'am, not dis nigger!"

"I'll be the coon to burn it," I shouted. "I'll be glad to burn it."

Gladolia's heavy steps moved off kitchenward.

Then my Lavinia turned waspishly to me again. "John, there's not a bit of use trying to deceive me. What is it you are trying to conceal from me?"

"Who? Me? Oh, no," I lied elaborately, looking around to see if that dratted ghost was concealed enough. She was so big, and I'm rather a smallish man. But that was a bad move on my part.

"John," Lavinia demanded like a ward boss, "you are hiding some_body_ in here! Who is it?"

I only waved denial and gurgled in my throat. She went on, "It's bad enough to have you flirt over the Ouija board with that hussy----"

"Oh, the affair was quite above-board, I assure you, my love!" I cried, leaping lithely about to keep her from focusing her gaze behind me.

She thrust me back with sudden muscle. "_I will_ see who's behind you! Where is that Helen?"

"Me? I'm Helen," came from the ghost.

Lavinia looked at that apparition, that owl-eyed phantom, in plaid skirt and stiff shirtwaist, with hair skewed back and no powder on her nose. I threw a protecting husbandly arm about her to catch her when she should faint. But she didn't swoon. A broad, satisfied smile spread over her face.

"I thought you were Helen of Troy," she murmured.

"I used to be Helen of Troy, New York," said the ghost. "And now I'll be moving along, if you'll excuse me. See you later."

With that she telescoped briskly, till we saw only a hand waving farewell.

My Lavinia fell forgivingly into my arms. I kissed her once or twice fervently, and then I shoved her aside, for I felt a sudden strong desire to write. The sheets of paper on my desk spread invitingly before me.

"I've got the bulliest plot for a ghost story!" I cried.

Transcriber's Note:

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The atomic bomb meant, to most people, the end. To Henry Bemis it meant something far different--a thing to appreciate and enjoy.

Time Enough At Last

By Lynn Venable

For a long time, Henry Bemis had had an ambition. To read a book. Not just the title or the preface, or a page somewhere in the middle. He wanted to read the whole thing, all the way through from beginning to end. A simple ambition perhaps, but in the cluttered life of Henry Bemis, an impossibility.

Henry had no time of his own. There was his wife, Agnes who owned that part of it that his employer, Mr. Carsville, did not buy. Henry was allowed enough to get to and from work--that in itself being quite a concession on Agnes' part.

Also, nature had conspired against Henry by handing him with a pair of hopelessly myopic eyes. Poor Henry literally couldn't see his hand in front of his face. For a while, when he was very young, his parents had thought him an idiot. When they realized it was his eyes, they got glasses for him. He was never quite able to catch up. There was never enough time. It looked as though Henry's ambition would never be realized. Then something happened which changed all that.

Henry was down in the vault of the Eastside Bank & Trust when it happened. He had stolen a few moments from the duties of his teller's cage to try to read a few pages of the magazine he had bought that morning. He'd made an excuse to Mr. Carsville about needing bills in large denominations for a certain customer, and then, safe inside the dim recesses of the vault he had pulled from inside his coat the

pocket size magazine.

He had just started a picture article cheerfully entitled "The New Weapons and What They'll Do To YOU", when all the noise in the world crashed in upon his ear-drums. It seemed to be inside of him and outside of him all at once. Then the concrete floor was rising up at him and the ceiling came slanting down toward him, and for a fleeting second Henry thought of a story he had started to read once called "The Pit and The Pendulum". He regretted in that insane moment that he had never had time to finish that story to see how it came out. Then all was darkness and quiet and unconsciousness.

* * * * *

When Henry came to, he knew that something was desperately wrong with the Eastside Bank & Trust. The heavy steel door of the vault was buckled and twisted and the floor tilted up at a dizzy angle, while the ceiling dipped crazily toward it. Henry gingerly got to his feet, moving arms and legs experimentally. Assured that nothing was broken, he tenderly raised a hand to his eyes. His precious glasses were intact, thank God! He would never have been able to find his way out of the shattered vault without them.

He made a mental note to write Dr. Torrance to have a spare pair made and mailed to him. Blasted nuisance not having his prescription on file locally, but Henry trusted no-one but Dr. Torrance to grind those thick lenses into his own complicated prescription. Henry removed the heavy glasses from his face. Instantly the room dissolved into a neutral blur. Henry saw a pink splash that he knew was his hand, and a white blob come up to meet the pink as he withdrew his pocket handkerchief and carefully dusted the lenses. As he replaced the glasses, they slipped down on the bridge of his nose a little. He had been meaning to have them tightened for some time.

He suddenly realized, without the realization actually entering his conscious thoughts, that something momentous had happened, something worse than the boiler blowing up, something worse than a gas main exploding, something worse than anything that had ever happened before. He felt that way because it was so quiet. There was no whine of sirens, no shouting, no running, just an ominous and all pervading silence.

* * * * *

Henry walked across the slanting floor. Slipping and stumbling on the uneven surface, he made his way to the elevator. The car lay crumpled at the foot of the shaft like a discarded accordian. There was something inside of it that Henry could not look at, something that had once been a person, or perhaps several people, it was impossible to tell now.

Feeling sick, Henry staggered toward the stairway. The steps were still there, but so jumbled and piled back upon one another that it was more like climbing the side of a mountain than mounting a stairway. It was quiet in the huge chamber that had been the lobby of the bank. It looked strangely cheerful with the sunlight shining through the girders where the ceiling had fallen. The dappled sunlight glinted across the silent lobby, and everywhere there were huddled lumps of unpleasantness that made Henry sick as he tried not to look at them.

"Mr. Carsville," he called. It was very quiet. Something had to be done, of course. This was terrible, right in the middle of a Monday, too. Mr. Carsville would know what to do. He called again, more loudly, and his voice cracked hoarsely, "Mr. Carrrrsville!" And then he saw an arm and shoulder extending out from under a huge fallen block of marble ceiling. In the buttonhole was the white carnation Mr. Carsville had worn to work that morning, and on the third finger of that hand was a massive signet ring, also belonging to Mr. Carsville. Numbly, Henry realized that the rest of Mr. Carsville was under that block of marble.

Henry felt a pang of real sorrow. Mr. Carsville was gone, and so was the rest of the staff--Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Emory and Mr. Prithard, and the same with Pete and Ralph and Jenkins and Hunter and Pat the guard and Willie the doorman. There was no one to say what was to be done about the Eastside Bank & Trust except Henry Bemis, and Henry wasn't worried about the bank, there was something he wanted to do.

He climbed carefully over piles of fallen masonry. Once he stepped down into something that crunched and squashed beneath his feet and he set his teeth on edge to keep from retching. The street was not much different from the inside, bright sunlight and so much concrete to crawl over, but the unpleasantness was much, much worse. Everywhere there were strange, motionless lumps that Henry could not look at.

Suddenly, he remembered Agnes. He should be trying to get to Agnes, shouldn't he? He remembered a poster he had seen that said, "In event

of emergency do not use the telephone, your loved ones are as safe as you." He wondered about Agnes. He looked at the smashed automobiles, some with their four wheels pointing skyward like the stiffened legs of dead animals. He couldn't get to Agnes now anyway, if she was safe, then, she was safe, otherwise ... of course, Henry knew Agnes wasn't safe. He had a feeling that there wasn't anyone safe for a long, long way, maybe not in the whole state or the whole country, or the whole world. No, that was a thought Henry didn't want to think, he forced it from his mind and turned his thoughts back to Agnes.

* * * * *

She had been a pretty good wife, now that it was all said and done. It wasn't exactly her fault if people didn't have time to read nowadays. It was just that there was the house, and the bank, and the yard. There were the Jones' for bridge and the Graysons' for canasta and charades with the Bryants. And the television, the television Agnes loved to watch, but would never watch alone. He never had time to read even a newspaper. He started thinking about last night, that business about the newspaper.

Henry had settled into his chair, quietly, afraid that a creaking spring might call to Agnes' attention the fact that he was momentarily unoccupied. He had unfolded the newspaper slowly and carefully, the sharp crackle of the paper would have been a clarion call to Agnes. He had glanced at the headlines of the first page. "Collapse Of Conference Imminent." He didn't have time to read the article. He turned to the second page. "Solon Predicts War Only Days Away." He flipped through the pages faster, reading brief snatches here and there, afraid to spend too much time on any one item. On a back page was a brief article entitled, "Prehistoric Artifacts Unearthed In Yucatan". Henry smiled to himself and carefully folded the sheet of paper into fourths. That would be interesting, he would read all of it. Then it came, Agnes' voice. "Henrrreee!" And then she was upon him. She lightly flicked the paper out of his hands and into the fireplace. He saw the flames lick up and curl possessively around the unread article. Agnes continued, "Henry, tonight is the Jones' bridge night. They'll be here in thirty minutes and I'm not dressed yet, and here you are ... _reading_." She had emphasized the last word as though it were an unclean act. "Hurry and shave, you know how smooth Jasper Jones' chin always looks, and then straighten up this room." She glanced regretfully toward the fireplace. "Oh dear, that paper, the television schedule ... oh well, after the Jones leave there won't be time for anything but the late-late movie and.... Don't just sit

there, Henry, hurrreeee!"

Henry was hurrying now, but hurrying too much. He cut his leg on a twisted piece of metal that had once been an automobile fender. He thought about things like lock-jaw and gangrene and his hand trembled as he tied his pocket-handkerchief around the wound. In his mind, he saw the fire again, licking across the face of last night's newspaper. He thought that now he would have time to read all the newspapers he wanted to, only now there wouldn't be any more. That heap of rubble across the street had been the Gazette Building. It was terrible to think there would never be another up to date newspaper. Agnes would have been very upset, no television schedule. But then, of course, no television. He wanted to laugh but he didn't. That wouldn't have been fitting, not at all.

He could see the building he was looking for now, but the silhouette was strangely changed. The great circular dome was now a ragged semi-circle, half of it gone, and one of the great wings of the building had fallen in upon itself. A sudden panic gripped Henry Bemis. What if they were all ruined, destroyed, every one of them? What if there wasn't a single one left? Tears of helplessness welled in his eyes as he painfully fought his way over and through the twisted fragments of the city.

* * * * *

He thought of the building when it had been whole. He remembered the many nights he had paused outside its wide and welcoming doors. He thought of the warm nights when the doors had been thrown open and he could see the people inside, see them sitting at the plain wooden tables with the stacks of books beside them. He used to think then, what a wonderful thing a public library was, a place where anybody, anybody at all could go in and read.

He had been tempted to enter many times. He had watched the people through the open doors, the man in greasy work clothes who sat near the door, night after night, laboriously studying, a technical journal perhaps, difficult for him, but promising a brighter future. There had been an aged, scholarly gentleman who sat on the other side of the door, leisurely paging, moving his lips a little as he did so, a man having little time left, but rich in time because he could do with it as he chose.

Henry had never gone in. He had started up the steps once, got almost

to the door, but then he remembered Agnes, her questions and shouting, and he had turned away.

He was going in now though, almost crawling, his breath coming in stabbing gasps, his hands torn and bleeding. His trouser leg was sticky red where the wound in his leg had soaked through the handkerchief. It was throbbing badly but Henry didn't care. He had reached his destination.

Part of the inscription was still there, over the now doorless entrance. P-U-B--C L-I-B-R---. The rest had been torn away. The place was in shambles. The shelves were overturned, broken, smashed, tilted, their precious contents spilled in disorder upon the floor. A lot of the books, Henry noted gleefully, were still intact, still whole, still readable. He was literally knee deep in them, he wallowed in books. He picked one up. The title was "Collected Works of William Shakespeare." Yes, he must read that, sometime. He laid it aside carefully. He picked up another. Spinoza. He tossed it away, seized another, and another, and still another. Which to read first ... there were so many.

He had been conducting himself a little like a starving man in a delicatessen--grabbing a little of this and a little of that in a frenzy of enjoyment.

But now he steadied away. From the pile about him, he selected one volume, sat comfortably down on an overturned shelf, and opened the book.

Henry Bemis smiled.

There was the rumble of complaining stone. Minute in comparison with the epic complaints following the fall of the bomb. This one occurred under one corner of the shelf upon which Henry sat. The shelf moved; threw him off balance. The glasses slipped from his nose and fell with a tinkle.

He bent down, clawing blindly and found, finally, their smashed remains. A minor, indirect destruction stemming from the sudden, wholesale smashing of a city. But the only one that greatly interested Henry Bemis.

He stared down at the blurred page before him.

He began to cry.

THE END

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